JANUARY 15th ISSUE, 1930
VOL. LXXIII No. 3

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30 Cents

January 15th

Adventure

Published Twice a Month

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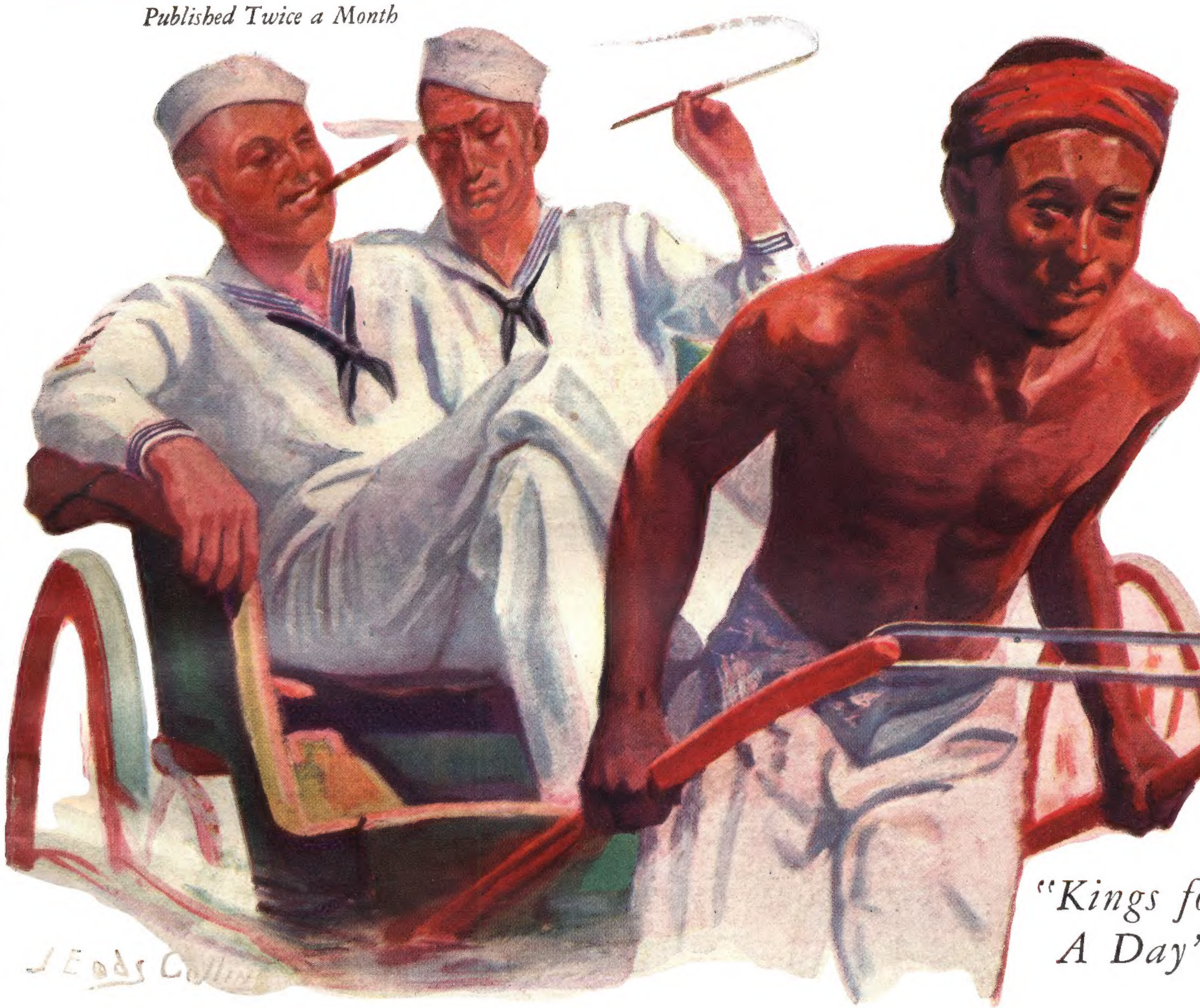

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Cover Design by J. Eads Collins *Headings by H. M. Bonnell*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; B. C. Dunklin, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; Anthony M. Rud, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents, in Canada Thirty Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents.

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The SHADOW *of* EHRENBREITSTEIN

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

CHAPTER I

THE ARMY OF OCCUPATION

AN IMMENSE equestrian statue stands where the Moselle River flows into the Rhine. The fiercely arrogant mien, the frowning solemnity, the haughty pride portrayed there in the huge bronze figure, proclaim it as the likeness of some former imperial war lord. Above the statue the ruins of ancient medieval castles frown down sullenly on the valley. Most frowning of all these fortifications is the bastioned, turreted bulk of Ehrenbreitstein, that former great fortress-key to the Rhineland.

On this day a star spangled banner twinkled and rippled cheerfully above the fortress which lay somber and menacing beneath it, and truly the American flag seemed to be shaking with laughter at all the age old haughtiness and humorless arrogance which marked the region.

Everything was dark and gray and somber.

Below the fortress lay the city of Coblenz, the cobblestones of its narrow old streets echoing to the footsteps of many men in olive drab, its high walled buildings resounding to the cheerful voices of soldiers—Americans from New York and Texas, from Florida and California, from Washington and Maine, happy-go-lucky men, not at all impressed with their dignity as representatives of a conquering army in occupied territory.

The Coblenzers marveled at these men. They had never seen such soldiers, men who laughed at everything, including

A Complete Novel of the American Army of the Occupation of the Rhine

battle and sudden death. The older ones, those who had followed Von Moltke in 1870, shook their heads in downright disbelief that such men could make good soldiers. The younger ones, who had doffed their uniforms after Chateau-Thierry and the Argonne, were not so downright in their disbelief, remembering tales that they had heard and things they had seen.

To an officer reared in the cloistered seclusion of West Point, brought up in the tenets of Baron Von Steuben, whose principles are the rock on which the American Military Academy is founded, Coblenz, with its stern and martial air, its streets resounding to military music, to the high clear notes of bugles, to the clatter of cavalry, the tramp of infantry and the rumble and clank of artillery, seemed indeed a fitting and harmonious place. To an officer of the caliber of Brigadier General Stithers it seemed an earthly paradise.

Leaning back in his luxurious limousine, his chest covered with bits of varicolored ribbon, a fur collared overcoat, of the style affected by Prussian Guard officers, over his shoulders, he was whirled rapidly through the streets to the shrill clamor of his special automobile horn. Whichever way he looked, groups of soldiers leaped to attention and stood at the salute as he passed by. When he arrived at last at his own headquarters his alert chauffeur stepped nimbly to the door of the limousine and opened it, saluting as the general came forth. Two sentries on duty at the door snapped into rigid attention, cracking their heels together

loudly as they came to a "present arms" that fairly crackled with vigor.

The crack of those heels was music to the ears of the general. Had he not himself conceived the brilliant idea of requiring the soldiers to put small copper plates on their shoes so that the sound of their snapping to attention should be accentuated ten-fold?

His aide leaped to help him off with his coat as he entered his offices. His brigade adjutant, Major Timothy, was there, a little, red faced officer with a constantly placating smile and furtive eyes. His marvelous ability in agreeing with the general under any and all circumstances made him an ideal brigade adjutant. Major Timothy stood up respectfully, with an air of being exceedingly proud to render homage to such greatness as shown refulgent from the brow of Brigadier General Stithers.

All this was very soothing to the general's soul. No less soothing was the attitude of Colonel Sidney Bawl, a fat and Falstaffian commander of one of the infantry regiments, a prince of good fellows with rolls of fat around his neck, an unequaled teller of shady stories, with dark paunches under his eyes, a veritable hail-fellow-well-met to all the world—at a drinking bout or a poker party or a trip around the town. There was something shifty and a little frightened in the depths of his small, piggish blue eyes. He exuded an air of deferential good fellowship, more flattering in its effect than even the simple homage of the brigade adjutant, Timothy.

"You told me to see you about that lieutenant of mine, General," said Colonel Bawl.

The general, feeling in an expansive mood, waved Bawl to a seat and offered him a cigar.

"Yes, I have decided on his case." The general shut his mouth firmly; he prided himself on his instant decisions. "I want you to prefer charges against him immediately under the 95th Article of War."

Even Bawl's eyes grew round at this.

"Why, General, he's only been in the Army a month or two. He—"

"No matter. Get rid of him. He's no good."

"Yes, sir. I'll have it done right away, sir." Bawl rose, saluted and left.

For a moment the general was left alone at his desk. Before him lay a black bound volume, a book on the organization and training of armies by a Prussian, General Von Der Goltz. Stithers looked at the book fondly. It was a good book. Close application to it had put him where he was today; and he fingered his row of decorations absently. Take the case of that lieutenant now. If he had not been steeled to the precepts of Von Der Goltz he might have been swayed by the youth and the inexperience of the young officer. But "Be stony hearted," says Von Der Goltz. "The way to success lies through molding subordinates to the leader's will, disregarding any notions of pity, friendship or other weak considerations. Strike terror into the hearts of subordinates as well as in the hearts of the enemy," says Von Der Goltz.

Stithers looked up to where the rays of the afternoon sun cast the blocky, somber, shadow of Ehrenbreitstein over the city and thrilled a little at the sight of its huge bulk and the unyielding power shown in its massive walls and great barbicans. A little out of date it was, to be sure, but what a magnificent symbol of military autocracy the fortress remained.

His musings were interrupted by the deprecating cough of Major Timothy, who stood in the doorway, a paper in his hand.

"Yes?" The general's voice was a trifle impatient.

"Headquarters has sent down the report on the disciplinary standing of all the combat units in the American forces in Germany, sir," explained Timothy.

"Yes?" replied the general more easily. "I suppose my brigade shapes up all right?"

"Yes, sir, indeed, sir, yes, sir," gushed

Timothy; then a shade of doubt passed over his face. "All except—"

"Except what?" The general straightened out in his chair.

"Except the cavalry squadron," finished Timothy apprehensively.

"The cavalry squadron!" exploded the general. From the way he shot out the words it sounded like an oath.

"Yes, sir," went on Timothy, still a little frightened. "It stands pretty low, sir, in the comparative scale, sir."

"How low?" demanded the general grimly.

"The lowest on—on the list, sir," replied Timothy in a low voice, and stepped back a pace.

The general had leaped to his feet. He paced the floor, his eyes flaming with vicious anger.

"That low mob!" he snorted. "I'll have somebody's head for this, spoiling the record of my brigade. I'll show them! Have a letter written at once to headquarters, asking for the relief of the commanding officer of the squadron. Issue an order immediately confining all men to barracks for two weeks—" The general stopped and thought.

"Very well, sir, but—but—headquarters demands that you explain the low standing of this unit under your command by return letter."

And again Timothy took a step backward so that now he was nearly out in the anteroom; for the general had grown white with anger and had flung himself at his desk and taken up pen and ink to draft a reply.

General Stithers' glow of well-being had been thoroughly ruined for the day and somebody would pay for it. The general's trim, spare figure shook with suppressed anger as he wrote the indorsement to the letter. Being an infantry officer, his opinions of cavalry were none too high to start with. His thoughts of all cavalry in general, and of this squadron in particular, were too sulphurous to admit of discussion in mixed company.

RIGHT under Ehrenbreitstein clustered the cavalry barracks and stables. The normal activity of a cavalry stable has something cheerful about it. The multitude of tasks which the care of horses entails are generally carried out with the same good natured acceptance of matters that characterizes the American soldier. Men grooming, feeding and watering horses find time to chaff each other, to carry on animated conversations and to indulge in a normal amount of laughter.

The lengthening rays of the afternoon sun threw the shadow of Ehrenbreitstein over the stable yard. Men moved around in its gloom silently and listlessly. The only sounds to break the stillness were the occasional rap of currycomb against brush or the angry scolding of some horse that was slow in standing over. An air of settled gloom pervaded the place.

Sergeant Brady worked over the cleaning of a flat saddle.

"Believe me," he averred, "I seen some soldierin' in my time. I been in the Islands, I been in Cuba, I been on the Border, but you can lead me out in hobbles if I ever seen any soldierin' like this."

"Soldierin'? You ain't aimin' to dignify this here wild jamboree we're bein' put through by the name of soldierin'?" Matson's voice was full of scorn.

Two men, wearing the crossed rifles of the infantry on their collar tabs, came sauntering into the courtyard, looking bland and unconcerned, almost too bland and unconcerned.

Brady and Matson regarded them sourly and bent anew to their tasks.

"Hi, Matson," called one of the new arrivals. "C'mon and let's mooch down to Fritz's café."

"Go t'hell, will you?" Matson's response was brief and acid.

The taller of the two infantrymen looked at his companion in mock surprise.

"How come, Matty, old kid? You ain't meanin' to say you gotta stay here on fatigue the rest o' the day?"

"You know damn' well I gotta stay here the rest of the day!" snorted Matson.

"Now, ain't that too bad?" The tall infantryman turned to his companion, looking surprised and sympathetic. "Jus' think, these here poor cavalry guys gotta work all day. It's hard, ain't it?"

"Cruel hard," grinned his companion.

"But never mind, Matson," comforted the tall infantryman. "I'll mosey down and tell Greta you're too busy to look her up."

"You go foolin' around Greta and the next suit of clothes you're gonna wear'll be made outa wood." Matson's voice was baleful.

"Ain't he the generous guy!" marveled the tall infantryman.

Brady's voice boomed in:

"Lay off that stuff! Getta hell outa here!"

"Whadda you know about that?" marveled the infantryman. "It's gettin' so a guy can't even come in here to pass the time o' day without gettin' treated discourteous."

"I'll do worse than treat you discourteous," explained Brady, rising slowly. "I'll comb your raven locks with that there pitchfork if you don't get outa here. You heard me!" The two visitors faded out of the picture.

"It's bad enough havin' to work twenty-six hours a day without havin' every lousy doughboy and his brother come in here razzin' us about it," growled Brady. Then, looking toward the door of the orderly room— "Here comes more trouble," he announced.

"Sergeant Brady." The voice of the orderly room clerk came across the stable yard.

"Yeh." Brady turned morose eyes on the approaching soldier. "I ain't deef," he explained.

The troop clerk came on with a paper in his hand.

"You gotta turn out thirteen horses this afternoon and five men with 'em," announced the clerk.

"Sure," said Brady. "These horses been out all day at drill and saber practise, the men been drillin', cleanin' equipment and dog-robbin' for officers up to ten o'clock last night. Now all the officers' women in Coblenz wants to go ridin', I suppose. Sure, make 'em all happy, that's our motto, All we need is two or three hours sleep a week. *We* ain't kickin'. Go on, read off the punishment list."

"Let's see; two horses, gentle, for Major Townsend's wife and sister and a good man to look after 'em—"

"He'll have to be a good man, by jeez, gettin' up at five in the morning, workin' like hell all day, takin' a couple o' dizzy females ridin', missin' his supper, comin' in after dark, feedin' and cleanin' three horses and three saddles before he hits the hay. How come that doughboy major rates horses from the cavalry anyway for his family? Is this here a cavalry outfit or a livery stable?"

The troop clerk shrugged his shoulders, waiting until the storm died down.

"It ain't ours to reason why; it's ours to do or die," said Matson.

"Three horses for Major Drake, his wife and daughter, and a good orderly—"

"Yep, he's a tooth carpenter," commented Brady bitterly. "Go on."

"Two horses for Lieutenant Smith and his girl, and a orderly," continued the clerk.

"Why can't that four eyed little nitwit do his courtin' on foot, and why the hell does he need an orderly?" demanded Brady. "Don't he never figger that a soldier might want to look up a girl friend hisself once in awhile?"

The troop clerk replied nothing to this, but studied the list and appeared to hesitate before announcing the next name. He cleared his throat once or twice.

"GO ON, give the rest of the bad news. It's got so's if *I* had five minutes off all to myself I wouldn't know what to do with it," stated Brady.

"Two of the best horses in the squadron for General Stithers and his nephew—and the best orderly in the squadron."

The three men looked at one another in stony silence. Down at the end of the

stable yard a lonesome horse whinnied for his stable mate. Across the way the horseshoer hammered slowly and heavily at his forge. A squad of men with a wagon, working away at policing the stableyard, passed the three men and looked at them curiously as they stood there. Brady's face was black with anger. Matson's fists clenched and unclenched and his eyes glittered. The troop clerk looked from one to the other, subdued and a little timorous. Then he cleared his throat again.

"Orders out now from Stithers we gotta begin bayonet practise tomorrow—"

"Bayonet practise!" Again the two men looked at each other. "Bayonet practise for cavalry—"

"I give up," announced Brady. "Ain't there a officer in this here cavalry outfit with guts enough to tell that crazy galoot that we ain't through our work now until ten or eleven at night, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays included?"

"Retz is relieved and we got a new C. O. comin'," interposed the troop clerk. "His name's Davies."

Brady looked uninterested.

Matson pricked up his ears.

"Not Davies outa the old 3rd?" he asked curiously.

"Yeh, one o' the guys in the office says he used to know him in the 3rd."

"That's him." Matson nodded and turned to Brady. "Why, boy, don't you know who *he* is?"

Brady shook his head.

"Why, man alive, he's the guy that busted up that near mutiny in the nigger cavalry and got old Timmy Phelan before a retirin' board after old Timmy had put about half the regiment in the hospital!"

"Sure, I heard o' him," nodded Brady, "but he can't do nothin' around here. What can a major do against a high and mighty B. G. as mean as this here Stithers coyote?"

The troop clerk turned to go.

"Oh, yeh," he added. "Stithers has confined the whole outfit to barracks for two weeks on account o' our disciplinary standing."

"We been confined to barracks for months anyway. What difference does that make?" Brady shrugged his shoulders. "When's this guy Davies due to arrive?"

"Most any time now."

"Well, here's hopin' he gets here before the hull outfit goes over the hill. I'll be makin' tracks outa here myself pretty soon if things go on gettin' worse and worse."

"Oh, things'll be all right soon's Davies gets here," comforted Matson.

Brady shook his head.

"His intentions may be good, but he'll be up against one o' the meanest guys that ever wore shoe leather when he gets up against Stithers, and I don't mean maybe."

"There'll be some fur flyin', I'm tellin' you. Davies ain't gonna sit tight and say nothin' when he sees what's goin' on." Matson was all confidence.

The voice of the troop clerk called from the orderly room.

"Hey! Sergeant Brady! There's an order just come in for fifteen men and a wagon to go up immediately and police up the polo field. Headquarters wants to play a game tomorrow."

"How about supper for them men?" Brady called back.

"I dunno. They got to get up there right away and take a chance on gettin' somethin' when they get back."

"Take a chance? Whadda you mean, take a chance?" shouted Brady angrily; then shrugging his shoulders, he turned to look up his men. "Oh, hell, what's the use?" he growled.

"DON'T you suppose we could talk the cooks into saving supper for those men, Sergeant?"

It was a pleasant voice, pitched in courteous accents, but Sergeant Brady was too old a soldier to miss the note of authority which gave resonance to the words. Instinctively he knew that it was the voice of a man accustomed to prompt obedience, so accustomed to prompt obedience, in fact, that it was

unnecessary to speak in an authoritative tone.

Therefore he turned, his hand already moving up to the salute and his shoulders thrown back. In an instant's swift appraisal the sergeant received an impression of a firm, strong face, clear eyes with a quizzical note of humor buried in their depths, of a tall, strongly knit figure wearing a well cut uniform after the manner of a man long habituated to wearing a uniform. There was a glint of gold from the maple leaves of a major embroidered on the shoulders, a flash of varicolored ribbons across the chest and an impression of very well cared for leather in the trim boots and snug Sam Browne belt.

The seething rage that had possessed the soul of the sergeant for the past half hour somehow began to dissolve under the friendliness of the major's gaze. There was some calming influence about this unknown officer, something sane which did not permit of great excitement over trifles, something stable which put matters in their proper relation.

"Don't you suppose we could talk the cooks into saving supper for those men?" asked the officer again.

"*You* certainly could, sir," said Sergeant Brady with emphasis, much to his own surprise, but found after all that he meant it.

"All right—we'll make a stab at it." And then the strange officer very simply introduced himself. "My name's Davies," he said, and put forth his hand.

"Pleased to meetcha," mumbled Sergeant Brady, grasping it heartily, a little taken aback nevertheless.

There is great difference in the manner of officers toward men. There are many who are stonily indifferent and cultivate an assumed coldness and harsh manner. There are others who unbend after the fashion of Jupiter talking to a mere mortal from the heights of Olympus, immensely and annoyingly patronizing. There are still others who, in the parlance of the camp, "slobber all over a guy" and are as offensively friendly as the others are offensively distant. Certainly this man was plain and simple, thought Brady; didn't seem to be all het up about bein' a field officer; talked like one man to another. And suddenly, without knowing why—so intangible is that little spark of like or dislike passing between man and man—Sergeant Brady was glad that this major was around, was glad that he was going to take over the squadron and felt glad to serve under him.

The two men walked toward the kitchen. It suddenly occurred to Brady that there were a hundred things he wanted to tell this new commanding officer, but again that caution of the old soldier kept his lips tight locked until he should be asked.

But even Brady's dour features broke into a grin as he watched the new major interview the cook. Cooks are by nature and training a perpetually indignant breed. Old Svenson was no exception to the rule, a hard boiled, sour faced Swede, standing there at the chopping block with meat cleaver in hand. He looked the sort of individual whose solid head is impervious to any argument save that provided by the butt end of a rifle. But Svenson melted under Major Davies' quiet voice, and even nodded his head violently in assent, twisting his face meanwhile in what was, for Svenson, an attempt at a pleasant smile.

As they came out of the kitchen Davies stared curiously at a group of men leading a number of saddlehorses out of the stable yard.

"Where are those men and horses going?" he asked Brady.

"They been ordered out, sir, to take some of the officers and their ladies out ridin'."

Davies raised his head quickly and Sergeant Brady saw his lips move as he counted the men and horses.

"Is that a usual detail around here at this time of the day?" the officer asked quietly.

"Yes, sir, every day, with twice as many on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays."

The major said nothing. The two

strolled down the picket lines and came to a halt before a small outhouse near the gates. From within the house came the sound of many voices. A sentinel armed with a rifle, pacing his post back and forth before the building, came to a sharp halt, faced outward and presented arms as the officer came near.

"What's this?" asked Davies, knowing full well what it was.

"Guardhouse, sir," answered the sentry, coming to "port arms" as he spoke.

"How many prisoners?" was the next question.

"Twenty, sir; sixteen inside and four outside."

Davies turned away, whistling to himself in surprise, and absently returned the sentinel's parting salute.

From high above them on the ramparts of Ehrenbreitstein came the warning call of an infantry bugle, sounding the notes of "first call." The sound was echoed over the Rhine. At the far end of the stable yard a trumpeter appeared and repeated the call on the cavalry trumpet. Men began turning out of barracks and lining up listlessly. There should have been two troops of dismounted men. Counting the men, Davies found that there were fifteen in one troop and eighteen in the other.

"Where are the rest of the men?" he asked.

He was told. He stared thoughtfully at the handful of soldiers as assembly blew and they came to attention and reports were made.

From the heights far above them floated down the notes of "retreat", that beautiful sunset call. Pure and serene and unhurried, it echoed and reechoed across the Rhine and against the farther hills. As its last note dropped softly on the evening air, there was the dull boom of a gun from the ramparts of Ehrenbreitstein. The echo of its note was drowned in the crash of the opening bars of the National Anthem played gravely and majestically by the headquarters band across the river. Every officer and man in Coblenz stood rigid, hand at salute, as the flag above the great fortress drifted slowly down in a final flash of scarlet and white. The shadow of Ehrenbreitstein was lost in the greater shadow of evening descending upon the Rhineland.

It was a thoughtful and preoccupied Davies who strolled back through the narrow medieval streets of Pfaffendorf and across the broad bridge of boats which spanned the hurrying Rhine. Here he was held up by the inevitable long line of barges carrying coal which passed through. On the other side his progress was delayed by a crowd of serious eyed Germans gathered in front of a store window, gazing silently at its contents. It was a delicatessen store showing a mediocre display of sausages and cheese, but the Coblenzers stared at it with grave and wistful interest.

Farther on a knot of high collared men, their bullet heads shaven bare of hair, were gathered discussing some weighty subject in grave and serious accents. Wondering idly whether this was one of those political meetings banned so rigorously by Allied Regulations governing the Rhineland, Davies looked at them curiously and met in return the wide open, blue eyed, rather blank stare of many German eyes. As he passed he heard one man still holding forth and caught the word—

"Kartoffel!"

The high price of potatoes was still the most important subject for discussion in the Rhineland.

WENDING his way to the Officers' Club, he found there a tea dance in progress and many Y.M.C.A. and Red Cross girls being whirled around the floor. There was a pause in the music after he entered and he looked up in surprise to see the commanding general entering, a lady on his arm. A hush fell over the ballroom.

Now this ballroom was provided, as were all German officers' ballrooms, with a sort of canopied throne on which to seat any wandering royalty that might come visiting. It was toward this that

the tall and distinguished looking American general made his way, his mien indeed very serious, as if he felt heavy responsibility for the ancient militarism of Coblenz and what the royal state required of its generals. The impression of royalty was strengthened rather than weakened by the conduct of all officers in the ballroom, who hurried up, singly and in groups, and paid their respects to the man sitting above them on the thronelike seat.

It came over Davies suddenly that the frowning mass of Ehrenbreitstein and this thronelike seat were all part and parcel of the same thing—the arrogance and the pomp and the heavy seriousness of medieval military power. It needed only the addition of a terribly important *Hofmarshall* with a staff of office and a silver chain about his neck and the presence of numerous vastly obsequious flunkies in silk stockings and knee breeches to make this ballroom into an exact replica of a minor royal or grand ducal court which had ruled the petty principalities of Germany for hundreds of years.

While he was there he met Turner, an old sidekick of Manila days. A small, rather shrunken lieutenant-colonel came up to them as he and Turner talked together. When Davies was introduced to the newcomer he observed that the lieutenant-colonel wore the five pointed star of the general staff.

The general staff officer, after studying Davies narrowly, walked away.

"Look out for that baby," cautioned Turner. "He's head of the Intelligence Section and specializes on reporting on officers who drink any hard liquor or raise their voices in song."

"So the royal court is complete," thought Davies swiftly, "even to the spies and the secret service."

"Yes," Turner continued, "but that oughtn't to worry you any. You're a hard working bird that never gets into hot water. Only be careful of that blamed squadron you're taking over across the river. It's a sure enough orphan outfit and no mistake. They call it the Pink Hussars. The Old Man—" and he nodded briefly to the thronelike seat—"uses it for sort of a life guards, household cavalry arrangement, spanking along doing escort duty and providing guards of honor for himself and all the visiting tin gods. He makes the squadron use French saddles and white tie ropes and all the trimmings. Stithers, to whose brigade they're attached, makes 'em perform everything laid down in the cavalry drill book and adds a few things thrown in from the infantry—"

"Do those men have two sets of equipment to look after?" asked Davies, startled, thinking of all the mess of junk a cavalry soldier has to look after even with one set of equipment.

"You're damn' tooting they do. They tell me that Stithers hates the cavalry—some cavalry second lieutenant probably stole his girl when he was a shavetail in the doughs—and he sure rides the hell out of that squadron. He's had about three squadron commanders relieved already. Keep your eyes peeled for him. He'll get you too if you're not careful. He's meaner than broken glass and as treacherous as a coppersnake."

Davies looked skeptical.

"He shouldn't worry me any if I mind my own business and do my work," he said quietly.

"H'm. You don't know Stithers—" Don Hargreaves, another old Border comrade, came up and shook hands with Davies.

"Don—" Turner spoke up after the flurry of meeting had died— "tell Dave here about what he's up against. He won't believe me."

Hargreaves looked at Davies a second and shook his head.

"What sort of a bird is this new brigade commander of mine anyway?" asked Davies.

Hargreaves shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. The only times I ever had anything to do with him were social events. But you remember Dick Henderson out of the 13th? Well, Dick was a tac at the Point at one time and being a good football man had charge of the

squad, and looked after their tender healths. Stithers was commandant of cadets. They had a training table for the gang of pigskin pushers. One day the meat was spoiled. You know Dick! Well, Dick hoists himself out of his seat, grabs the dish of beef, bangs through the folding doors into the kitchen and slams the meat down before the head cook.

" 'This meat's rotten,' says Dick. The cook looks a little mean, but that's that.

"The next day Stithers comes parading through, accompanied by orderlies, adjutant and a whole raft of staff. They clank up to Dick, and Stithers reads him a heavy lecture on his uncalled for and totally unprecedented action in speaking to the cook. Then Stithers went on at great length, telling him how the matter should have been handled. It seems that as assistant to the athletic officer, Dick should have written a letter to the athletic officer, who should have indorsed it with recommendations and passed it to the adjutant who would have indorsed it and passed it to the quartermaster, who would have transmitted it to the mess officer, who would have razzed the cook—or some such method as that; I forget the details. Well, old Dick listened to this in silence and such patience as he could muster. The general came to an end at last and started away, exultant in the knowledge of duty well done, when Dick suddenly woke up, a puzzled frown on his classic brow.

" 'But, General!' he called to Stithers' dignified back. Stithers turned around, looking a little annoyed.

" 'Yes, what is it?' he asked.

" 'Why—er—General,' Dick stuttered. Then the words came out with a rush. 'I understand all that, sir, but, but, what about that rotten meat?' "

Turner laughed out loud, Davies chuckled in spite of himself, and Hargreaves' eyes twinkled.

"Don't make any mistakes about Stithers," he went on. "He counts that day lost whose setting sun sees no soldier in the guardhouse, nor some officer's trial begun."

CHAPTER II

THE LETTER

DAVIES passed through the stable yard on his way to the squadron office the next morning. The men, working slowly and sullenly at their horses, looked after him, faintly curious.

"It's the new squadron K. O.," grunted one of them.

"Another K. O."

Private Brownell rapped his currycomb sharply against the ribs of the horse he was grooming, too sharply, for the horse turned, ears flattened to the sides of his head, and bit at him viciously.

"You cockeyed hunk o' misery, I'll learn you to bite!" growled Brownell angrily, and struck the animal over the nose.

Hitting horses over the head is not being done in good cavalry outfits, needless to state, but no one reprimanded him. The horse naturally jerked back on the tie rope and plunged against the animal on his left, which passed along the good will with interest until all of seven or eight horses were dancing and straining at their tie ropes.

"What t'ell kind of a picnic's goin' on down there?" Corporal Matson shouted angrily from the rear of the picket line.

"Aw, go poison yourself!" retorted Brownell savagely.

Corporal Matson appeared majestically around the corner of the picket line.

"What's that you say?" he demanded.

"You heard me," growled Brownell truculently; then, his voice reckless, "Go on, shove me in the mill! Hell of a lot I care. At least a guy can get some sleep there."

"I ain't aimin' to shove you in the mill." Matson's voice was reflective. "And I also ain't aimin' to take any dirt from any half baked sorehead who wants to sound off. Smell that, bo!" He shoved a big and exceedingly hairy fist under Brownell's nose. "You go shootin' off your face around me and it ain't poison you'll be needin'; what you'll need'll be a undertaker with a fine toothed

comb to pick up the pieces. Get that!"

"Aw, this damn' outfit makes a man grouchy."

Brownell's tone was less filled with animosity. His words could be interpreted in terms of an apology, in which spirit Matson chose to take them.

"Well, I ain't responsible for the outfit," grunted Matson and passed on.

The men resumed their sullen labors, disappointed that the grinding monotony of their existence had not been relieved by the excitement of a fight on the picket line.

It needed no trained eye to tell that the men were unwilling and sullen. And it takes a lot of abuse to make the American soldier sullen. As Davies well knew, there is no soldier in the world who has the American's capacity for making the most of a bad situation and who can be as cheerful under hardship and rough going.

And he was none too happy over the situation as he found it expressed in the attitudes of the men.

He was even less happy when he found the condition of affairs as disclosed by the papers on his desk.

Among the routine papers for his signature he found a batch of orders from General Stithers, stating in the most minute detail, even quoting book and paragraph, all that the cavalry squadron should accomplish in its training. It ran through "Cavalry Drill", "Field Service Regulations", "Manual of Guard Duty", "First Aid Drill", "Signal Manual", "Manual of Hippology", "Horseshoers' Manual", "Small Arms", "Firing Regulations for Rifle and Pistol", "Manual of the Sword", through several assorted pamphlets on the proper care of leather and steel, to "Instructions in the Care and Use of the Automatic Rifle", the "Manual of Courts-Martial" and the "Army Regulations".

This was nothing exceptional. A great deal is required of the cavalry soldier. Individually he has to master rifle, pistol, sword and automatic rifle; to ride, train, feed, shoe and care for his horse; to march, scout and fight, mounted or dismounted; to drill, perform guard and outpost, advance and rear guard duty, mounted and dismounted, and to signal, cook his own food, care for a wounded comrade or a sick horse, and to have enough knowledge of "Army Regulations" and "Manual of Courts-Martial" to avoid the many pitfalls of military life. As a rule, cavalry officers and soldiers have longer, harder hours than their comrades in other branches. Davies was not perturbed by this, being accustomed to it.

What did upset him was a supplementary order requiring the cavalrymen to perfect themselves at bombing and bayonet practise, a thing not required for cavalry, and purely an idea of General Stithers. Even this could have been assimilated, but Davies read on and found a sheaf of special orders. Perusal of these convinced him that the cavalry of the American forces in Germany, in addition to all the purely military duties they were called upon to perform, was expected to be a glorified livery stable and special service detachment of grooms, orderlies and messengers on duty at all hours and subject to the call of almost any officer who needed a horse, or a groom for himself or his family.

"Whe-e-w!" Davies sighed. "What an unholy mess. It's a wonder they don't make the cavalry soldiers act as nursemaids to the officers' children. Their skill at folding saddle blankets ought to make them real handy with diapers. Sergeant-Major!" he called.

The sergeant-major in the outer office entered quickly.

"Wish you'd get me up immediately a complete list of all special duty men and the duties upon which they are engaged."

"Very well, sir." The sergeant-major retired.

THE SPECIAL duty list was quickly forthcoming. It showed that well over half the men in the squadron were detailed to special duties in addition to the regular work. Such details as looking after the

commanding general's hunters, caring for the polo ponies, policing the polo field, acting as orderlies for this major and that colonel filled the list and accounted for a great deal of the unusually long hours of the men in the squadron.

After digesting this and making some notes on it, Davies turned to the next paper. This was a letter from the headquarters of the American forces in Germany giving a list of the combat organizations of the whole force, and rating them by comparative disciplinary standing. The standing of each unit was based upon the percentage of its men absent without leave, and upon the number of its personnel who were reported by the military police for infraction of various regulations, consisting of anything from unbuttoned collars to drunkenness and resisting arrest.

Away down at the very end of the list, with the lowest disciplinary standing of all the combat units in the American forces in Germany, stood the cavalry squadron.

A pithy indorsement from the office of General Stithers confined the men of the cavalry squadron to their barracks for two weeks. A supplementary paragraph from the same office demanded immediate written explanation from the commanding officer of the squadron as to the low state of his organization.

The officers of the outfit began to drift in. The first to arrive was a tall, heavily built captain named Bates. Bob Bates was of pleasing address and a man of witty conversation, but it did not take Davies long to figure that he was a recruit officer, with all his experience ahead of him.

"Bright enough," reflected Davies, "but not too scrupulous; witty enough, but not loyal. I doubt if he'll put heart and soul into getting the squadron in shape under my orders."

The next to arrive was Captain Hoe, Girolamo Hoe. His was an unsmiling face, and a stiff demeanor; his eyes were set a little too closely together for very great mental capacity.

"Humorless, unimaginative," judged Davies. "Should have a desk job."

Came then a tall lieutenant, one Greffinger. Conversation developed the fact that he had been a drum-major in the National Guard. When asked about what duties he was engaged upon, he replied vaguely something about polo ponies and a polo detachment.

"The more they come the worse they get," thought Davies.

After these came three lieutenants together and Davies' heart warmed to them on sight. The first was a tall, clumsy, serious eyed youngster named Colton. He was vaguely reminiscent of a big St. Bernard dog with all the courage and loyalty of the breed.

The second one was a slimly built, clear eyed, rather sensitive faced youngster named Harburg who, if Davies was any judge, had the makings of a splendid cavalry officer in him.

Butcher was the third member of the crew, another tall, lankily built youngster with the stiffness of West Point not yet out of his system. He looked the ideal cadet type of athlete and all around good man, not too bright in his studies, but fitted to gain men's liking and respect.

Came at last a youngster named O'Connor, who saluted Davies with a smile that would have disarmed the anger of an archangel. He possessed all of an Irishman's gusty wittiness and passionate likes and dislikes and goodness of heart.

Good material, all the last lieutenants, stuff out of which to make excellent officers. Of the captains and Lieutenant Greffinger, Davies was a little dubious. They had been afflicted with a little knowledge, which is a dangerous thing; they had had responsibility without possessing the skill to discharge it. They would have to unlearn much and the process was going to be painful to them.

The meeting was informal. Davies encouraged them to talk. In the babble of conversation he discovered very quickly that all the officers were possessed of a deep and virulent hatred for General Stithers. This shocked him a little, but

what surprised him more was the reason they gave. They did not hate the general because he harassed the life out of their men, nor because his exactions made life a misery to the soldiers; they hated him because he interfered with their polo, interfered with their dances and dinners at their cavalry club and made life uncomfortable for them by his many demands on their time.

"You know, Major," said O'Connor, the little impulsive Irishman, "when we were assigned to this squadron the chief of staff told us that our main duties were to be able to dance well and ride well—" And the rest all nodded in an aggrieved fashion.

To dance well and to ride well! What an ideal to set before young officers who might be called to lead men into battle. No wonder ten per cent. of the command was in the guardhouse and another ten per cent. was absent without leave. Davies tried to keep his astonishment to himself, but had grave difficulty in keeping his face from showing his feelings.

First call for drill sounded outside. A horse was brought up for Davies and he stood by watching while the troops formed up. It was a depressing sight. Privates wrangled with non-commissioned officers, officers scolded soldiers, every one was at dagger points with every one else. There was no organization into squads and platoons, and the officers were disregarding non-commissioned officers entirely and dealing directly with the men. The squadron was a mob, not a military organization, with each sub-unit functioning under its own power and responsible to its own commander.

The drill was a spiritless affair. Captains Bates and Hoe sat in the middle of the drill field and sent their troops maneuvering about them so that they commanded their units without having to bestir themselves. The lieutenants scolded and ragged the men after the fashion of file closers at West Point, so that nerves were strained and men were irritable.

Several times during the drill soldiers fell out of ranks and went trotting away toward barracks without permission asked or granted. Upon inquiry it developed that these were various orderlies of various staff officers who had to have horses looked after or brought up for their use.

There was no drill field near at hand large enough to maneuver the entire squadron. The two troops used separate drill fields, small plateaus lying across the gully from the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein under an outwork of the fort called Pfaffendorf.

As they were drilling Davies saw an officer ride up and sit his horse, watching. Surprised that the new arrival did not come over to greet him, the senior officer present, as is the custom, Davies rode over to do the courtesy anyway. He found Major Timothy, the little red faced officer with the placating smile and the furtive eyes who acted as brigade adjutant for General Stithers. Timothy, his thin legs clad in boots a size too large for him, his arms akimbo, looked obviously out of place and uncomfortable on a horse's back. He said little in response to Davies' polite greeting, only sat and watched the cavalry drill with a supercilious and enigmatic smile so that Davies finally left him, rather irritated.

There was a pause in the drill and the men were at rest. Young O'Connor, the little Irish lieutenant, came riding up with his friendly smile erased by a worried frown.

"Look out for that sneak of a Major Timothy," he said, without any preamble. "He's a spy for Stithers. He comes up and looks us over and goes back every day with a nasty report. He's the world's worst sneak. Gumshoes around our barracks and stables at all hours of the day and night."

Before Davies could make any reply the whistle for mounting came, and O'Connor flew back to rejoin his troop.

The lieutenant's remark made him a little angry. Davies could conceive of an officer failing to live up in many respects to the high code demanded of a gentleman, but he could not conceive of a commissioned officer acting the sneak.

As events showed he had something to learn about officers and gentlemen.

AFTER drill and stables Davies, according to his old custom, went through the kitchens and dining rooms of the barracks. The kitchens and barracks and dining rooms were spotlessly clean. He found out later that this was one of the hobbies of General Stithers and he approved of it. But what seemed to be no officer's hobby was the quality of the food served the men.

In A Troop kitchen he tasted half cooked beans, watery soup and soggy pudding. In B Troop kitchen the tale was repeated, with the addition of coffee which could be distinguished from the bean soup only by the fact that it was served in cups instead of bowls. Of troop management of its ration money, that management which, if properly done, insures men fresh butter and milk and vegetables and all the tasty and necessary adjuncts to a well balanced meal, he found nothing.

"Here's where I make myself unpopular," he said to himself grimly, and called the two captains into his office.

Captain Hoe came in frowning a little, as if slightly annoyed at the interruption of more important things. Captain Bates came in with that ready smile of good fellowship that fitted him so well, that smile that said, "Of course you are a little higher in rank than I am, but we know that's all foolishness, and I am prepared to forget those silly distinctions any time you say the word."

"Captain Bates—" Davies' voice was courteous— "I want to find out how much knowledge the officers of the squadron have of their duties. How much hay and how much oats are required to be issued as a daily ration to each of your horses?"

Both officers looked blank. Davies turned to Hoe. He shook his head.

"What is the monetary value of the ration allowance for each enlisted man this month?"

Again the two shook their heads.

"How many rounds of rifle ammunition are carried by each cavalry soldier in his belt when equipped for the field? How many rounds of reserve ammunition are carried in the trains for each man?"

"The supply sergeant looks after those details," Bates answered.

"Yes, but I'm not asking the supply sergeant; I'm asking you. How many men have you in the hospital, Captain Bates?"

Bates thought there were six.

"Eight," corrected Davies. "How many have you, Captain Hoe?"

Hoe did not dare to guess.

"What remedy do you use to cure a horse of flatulent colic?"

More shaking of heads.

"What's the most simple type of bridge to bridge a small stream or gully for wagons?"

They looked hurt at the idea that they should know anything about field engineering.

"If your troop was fired on by a ranging salvo of artillery which fell two hundred yards short, where, normally, would the next burst come?"

Again they looked aggrieved and shook their heads.

"What percentage of a cavalry command would be placed in the advance guard of a small unit in enemy country?"

Hoe guessed a third and Bates guessed a sixth.

"How long since you've inspected the food your cooks are preparing for your men?"

Hoe had inspected it two weeks ago. Bates stated that he had inspected that day. Davies was tempted to ask him what his men had for their dinner in that case, but forbore, thinking that it would look too much like doubting an officer's word.

Question after question he asked them, ranging from trench construction to military demolitions, from combat firing to sanitation, from the shoeing of horses to the functioning of an automatic rifle.

The questions only served to display an abysmal and painful ignorance, so that

Hoe looked even less intelligent than usual and Bates lost all of his cockiness. When Davies felt that they were sufficiently humbled to listen to reason, he ceased his questions and started to read them the riot act.

"You two are captains, each commanding nearly a hundred men, responsible not only for their lives and safety and health, but for the best tactical use possible of that man power. I have questioned you on every branch of knowledge that you are supposed to possess and have come to the conclusion that not only are you at present incapable of training, caring for and managing a troop in barracks, but that you would fall down most lamentably in campaign through a lack of knowledge as to how to fight. Gentlemen—" Davies' voice took on a harsher note— "the United States Government does not pay you to ride well and dance well, it does not confer a patent of nobility upon you when it gives you a captain's commission in the cavalry—you have forgotten that we are all middle class Americans commanding good middle class Americans like ourselves. We are not entitled by birth and noble blood to be saluted, to be waited upon and to have men stand around awed at our merest gesture. We are paid to train and instruct men, to weld them into fighting units, to instruct ourselves as to the best method of handling those fighting units when in battle. You are disloyal to the general above you and disloyal to the men below you. Naturally the men below you give you no loyalty, and naturally the man above you gives you no consideration."

"How are we disloyal to the men below us?" asked Bates truculently.

"I had hoped you would ask that question. If you were loyal to your men you would not have twenty men in the guardhouse and another twenty absent without leave; forty per cent. of a command in prison and absent is a terrible percentage and an absolute proof of an officer's incapacity to command. If you gave loyalty to your men you would see that they were fed properly and their ration money was wisely expended. You would follow them into the hospital to see that they received the proper medical attention when they are sick. You would fight to your last breath at having them working at all hours of the day and night, while men from other organizations are resting. You would investigate and determine the truth of any charge preferred against them by outside officers. You would follow them to court to see that they got justice. You would cease looking upon them as some sort of inferior beings gathered in to salute and render homage to you, to look after your polo ponies and your comforts and you would buckle down and learn your job."

Davies came to a pause. Bates was white in the face. Hoe looked sullen.

"Then, gentlemen, you would not have eight men in the guardhouse charged with being disrespectful to an officer. My advice to an officer who found it necessary to put men in the guardhouse for disrespect would be, either to mend his ways so that men would respect him for his ability as an officer, or to resign his commission and take up ditch digging as a profession. If you will observe I called you in here privately so that you should not have your lieutenants' confidence in you weakened by this plain speaking. I heard both of you calling down noncommissioned officers in the presence of privates today. You might learn a lesson from this way of handling such matters. That is all, gentlemen."

Davies' voice was dry and matter-of-fact. As the backs of the two disappeared through the door, he sighed a little to himself, having the normal man's liking for the friendship of his fellowmen. Then he straightened out his shoulders and called for the rest of the officers, the lieutenants.

For half an hour he put them through the same grilling course and dismissed them, most of them exceedingly thoughtful and somewhat ashamed. But it was a fact that their reaction was better than that of the captains.

ONE THING he did learn from talking to the lieutenants. It made him pause and reflect and realize that he had another obstacle to overcome before getting this organization into running shape. The most discouraging thing was the fact that these officers, being an oasis of cavalry in a great desert of infantry and artillery, most of whom had fought through the war, were all of them shaken in their belief in the efficacy of cavalry as a fighting arm. Sitting there, a little weary from his long grind, Davies decided to work up a series of lectures on the real value of cavalry at the opening stages of the war, on its immense services to the British, French, German and Russian armies on the Western Front, in East Prussia and Russia, in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

He felt that he had convinced the officers of the importance of their responsibility. Now came the most difficult task, which was to convince higher authority that the cavalry in Coblenz needed a whole lot of letting alone to work out its own destiny. He turned to the letter demanding explanation of the low disciplinary standing of the cavalry squadron and set to work to make reply to it.

As he composed himself to his task, he saw a mounted officer pass his window and in another moment there was a knock at the door of his office and Turner entered.

"Hello, Dave," he greeted. "The commanding general told me to blow over here and tell you to get busy making your men proficient with the new automatic rifles. The Old Man has been down at some conference with the Allied Commission and he's all het up about the revolutions in Germany and all the Communist trouble on the Ruhr. He told me to tell you that he expects your men to be proficient and capable automatic riflemen inside of thirty days at the most."

"Yes?" Davies looked reflectively at the papers on his desk, then nodded. "All right," he said, "I'll do it. But tell me about this war talk. Is there anything in this Communistic stuff?"

"Yes, more than appears on the surface. There have been outbreaks in every large city in Germany. They've had regular pitched battles between the police and the agitators in several places, with machine guns and artillery and armored cars all taking a hand. The Old Man is a great believer in cavalry and he says to tell you that, should any trouble occur, the cavalry will be called upon to play a very important rôle."

Davies nodded. Cavalry, as he well knew, is particularly good in street rioting, the average mob having a lively respect for the trampling feet of the horses and the weight and mass of the mounted men. It is a fact that cavalry can break up a mob with much less bloodshed than an equal or greater number of infantry.

"But why the sudden insistence upon the automatic rifle training?" he asked Turner.

"Don't forget that most of these Communists are ex-soldiers. They are not like an ordinary mob. They know how to fight. Most of them are returned prisoners of war from the Russian prison camps. A whole flood of them have been let loose in Germany and are being backed up by Moscow, who hopes to do some good fishing in the troubled waters."

"Then everything isn't so peaceful and serene on the Rhineland?"

"Not by a damn' sight! In addition to all that trouble, we've got to be in shape to march on into Germany in case she defaults on her obligations under the treaty. If the Communists gain power it will mean a new war all over again, for the first thing they will do will be to repudiate everything that Germany has agreed to in the peace treaty."

"In other words, this little old squadron of cavalry has to be in shape to deliver the goods, when and if called upon. As a squadron of cavalry it's a blame' good livery stable right now," said Davies.

"Yes, it's a mob," replied Turner absently and rose to take his departure.

Davies sat a long time in thought after

Turner left. This commanding a combat unit on the Rhineland was not peace time soldiering. The nations were gathered together here on the Rhine, those nations which were so like the resounding copper tubes of a mighty pipe organ, a great instrument which seldom played in harmony and which was capable of rolling forth a vast thunder of discord which could shake the world to its foundations and rend the very heavens. Germany was torn with revolution. Bolshevist Russia stood in the background, manipulating stops and keys which increased the discord; great mobs of half crazed men were roaming abroad destroying and slaying. There was no telling when a spark might fall that would light a huge conflagration which might conceivably destroy civilization entirely.

Well, his share in it was small, simply to wield and temper a fighting unit ready for what might break forth. And the old commanding general was wise in ordering that this combat unit be brought to the highest degree of fighting efficiency.

But thirty days was a short time in which to make expert automatic riflemen, especially in view of the little time his men had after accomplishing all the extra duties they were called upon to perform. The thing to do was to get some cooperation from higher authority in cutting down the extra duties.

He plunged anew into the drafting of the letter which was to secure this cooperation.

THE LETTER, when finished, was short and extremely concise. In terse sentences it described the condition of the cavalry squadron and the reasons for this condition. Davies stated that the morale of the squadron was at the lowest ebb. The cause for this low morale he ascribed to the demands made of the organization, in that it was required to be both an efficient cavalry combat unit and a service detachment of grooms and orderlies and was required, in addition to all this, to assimilate infantry instruction. As proof of his statements, he appended the long list of men on extra and special duty. The whole thing was a clear and concise tabulation of the evils that beset the squadron. In summing up, Davies requested that the men of the squadron be relieved of all duties other than their military duties as cavalry soldiers.

In his last paragraph he stated that, were the extra and special duties of the squadron cut down to a reasonable limit, he would make it the unit highest in disciplinary standing of any combat organization in Coblenz inside of the next thirty days.

The letter was addressed to the commanding general of the American forces in Germany through the commanding general of the brigade. In other words it had to pass through General Stithers' hands.

As he signed the letter and turned it over to the sergeant-major for forwarding, the door of his office was flung open and in stalked a truculent looking young major.

The newcomer advanced to the desk. Making no motion to introduce himself or to greet Davies, he leaned over the desk.

"I understand," he said, "that you've given orders that all requests for special duty men from this squadron will have to be sent to you for approval."

"Correct as hell," returned Davies dryly; then, rising from his chair, "My name's Davies," he stated courteously, and waited for the other man to do likewise.

The newcomer, rather abashed, put forth his hand awkwardly.

"I'm Lund. I've been detailed to devise a method of carrying the automatic rifle for cavalry. I've been takin' a couple or three men and a non-commissioned officer out every afternoon to test out the equipment."

"I see," returned Davies. "Sit down, won't you? How long have you been testing this out?"

Lund's face grew a little red.

"Oh, two or three months," he returned lamely.

"Well, how is it coming out? I'm interested, because I have an order here requiring me to make the squadron proficient in the automatic rifle in thirty days."

"It can't be done." Lund was positive. "My experiments aren't finished yet. I've got the saddlers working now on a new type of harness for carrying the rifle over the trooper's left shoulder."

Davies looked unenthusiastic.

"Do you think it's advisable to have the cavalry soldier carry anything on his back? You know, it raises the center of gravity of the horse's load, which increases the oscillation and makes it easier to get a sore-backed animal. Besides, the horse has to carry the load anyway; why not let it be carried on the saddle where the weight of the rifle will not bruise and bear down on the man's shoulders?"

"Impossible. You don't understand. I've been working on this thing for the last three months—"

Time enough to have found a solution, thought Davies, but said nothing.

"—and I've tried all that and it won't work. Here, I'll show you what I've doped out."

He hurried out to return with a complicated network of straps and a leather rifle boot of huge dimensions.

"You see, this strap passes across the trooper's chest, this one across his back and fastens to his belt. The rifle boot rests here—" And he went on explaining the purposes of each strap and buckle until Davies was dizzy with the complication of the thing and thoroughly convinced that it was impracticable under field service conditions.

"How about ammunition? Have you figured a way to carry that?" asked Davies in a pause in the flow of the other's oratory.

"Why—er—no, I haven't figured on that yet." Lund was somewhat nonplused.

"But it has to be figured on," went on Davies. "The automatic rifle eats up much ammunition. Let's see. There are eight rifles to a troop, and about eight squads to a troop. That means one rifle to a squad." And suddenly the solution came to Davies as in a lightning flash.

"You see," he explained quietly, "I've got to get these men and horses and guns combined and in fighting shape in thirty days. And I've got to have a system of carrying rifles and ammunition immediately. And I can't spare you any men right now except your own orderly—"

"You mean to say you are going to interfere with my experiment?" Lund's voice was angry; he leaned across the table.

"I mean to say I am going to ask that your experiments cease, and the men detailed to this job be relieved for other duties."

"Huh!" grunted Lund scornfully. "We'll see about that," he threatened, and stalked out without saying goodby.

RINGING up headquarters, Davies got Turner on the telephone.

"Listen here, Turner. There's some bird over here, a Major Lund, been fooling around for three months trying to devise a method of carrying the automatic rifle in the cavalry. He's a blamed nuisance. I'll have the troop mounted up carrying their rifles and ammunition in a practical fashion by tomorrow evening. Call off that bird, will you? Have an order issued relieving him from that duty. He uses too many of my men and horses."

"Surest thing you know, Dave," came back Turner's voice. "I had him put on that job, and I'll take him off."

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," quoted Davies; "blessed be the name of the Lord." He heard a laugh from the other end as he hung up.

Thus it was that as Lund stormed into Turner's office over at headquarters he was met with a slip of paper relieving him from duty with the squadron and from duty with his experiments.

"Well, that's three men and three horses retrieved," quoth Davies to himself, and went out into the stable yard and

hunted up the saddlers of the two troops.

Here he gave a succession of swift orders that resulted in a horse's being brought up saddled with a McClellan saddle. The puzzled saddlers removed the stirrups at his direction.

"Now," he said, "get me two gun boots widened to take the automatic rifle." They had two already.

"Sling those on either side of the saddle, strap them down so that they won't swing at the trot."

It was done. The two automatic rifles were put in the boots.

"There," said Davies, pointing to the horse which stood with a stripped saddle carrying two automatic rifles slung neatly on either side, "is your method of carrying the rifles. Now sling your ammunition boxes as a top and side load and make them secure."

This was done and a neat, workmanlike load was made of the whole pack.

The saddlers were keenly interested. One of them asked about the organization.

"One led horse with two guns and ammunition will be attached to each section of two squads. That gives four led horses to the troop. Make up the other seven saddles and boots and have the whole thing ready for tomorrow evening."

"We'll have it ready tonight if the major wants it," spoke up one of the men.

"Good; have it ready tonight and we'll take it to drill tomorrow morning."

The next morning Davies hurried over after reveille and found that the new automatic rifle packs were finished and had even been improved upon by the keenly interested men. One or two small changes had to be made. Drill call came and the troops went out. The changes in the packs were finished in five minutes and Davies accompanied them to the drill field and saw to their distribution to the troops.

Major Timothy, of the red face and the boots a size too large, returned happily to brigade headquarters, bursting with news. One might have expected that he would have been joyous at the fact that the cavalry, after three months of experiment, had at last devised a practicable method of carrying their automatic rifles and ammunition. But he said nothing of this.

"Major Davies was five minutes late getting to the drill field this morning," he reported with an air of sanctimonious sadness.

CHAPTER III

A THANKLESS JOB

MAJOR TIMOTHY'S announcement came at a propitious time. General Stithers had sat there for half an hour, staring at a letter. The longer he stared at it the more irritable did he become. The letter, which had to pass through his hands on its way to the commanding general of the American forces on the Rhine, was innocent of any subterfuge. In bald sentences, backed with lists of men on extra and special duty and hours of work required of each man, it told him that he had failed as a general officer to understand the special problems of cavalry. Now general officer means what the term implies; a general officer is supposed to command troops of all arms with equal skill.

Knowing the commanding general, who was a cavalryman, Stithers knew that there would be a lot of embarrassing questions asked of him if that letter reached its destination.

And as he thought upon the quandary in which the matter put him, his anger grew even hotter against the man who had put him in the wrong—Major Davies, who had had the effrontery to tell the truth about the squadron and the exactions under which it labored.

"Five minutes late for drill!" His brain seized upon that fact and he sat bold upright in his chair. "Write him a letter immediately demanding explanation by return indorsement and send it to him by messenger at once!"

This act having been consummated, he sat back and considered the letter anew. In the letter he learned about things con-

cerning the cavalry squadron which he had never before suspected. The longer he looked at it the more damning an arraignment of his methods it became. A broader minded man would have admitted his error and made the required changes for the sake of greater combat efficiency in one of the units he commanded. But not Stithers.

The facts were irrefutable. The squadron had been woefully mishandled from above. Davies had not said this in his letter, but the facts spoke for themselves. It simply would not do to let the commanding general see this letter.

"Major Timothy!" The ever alert little brigade adjutant hurried in. "Prepare a letter in answer to the communication from headquarters demanding explanation about the cavalry squadron and state that, due to the short time Major Davies has been in command, it has been deemed inexpedient to call upon him for explanation. State that suitable measures will be taken to secure a higher rating for the squadron."

"Yes, sir." Major Timothy looked a little worried. "And—this letter from Major Davies—what shall we do with that?"

"Oh, file it away somewhere—" Stithers dismissed the letter from his mind—"and that fellow Davies, he needs to be straightened out; he'll bear watching—you understand, Timothy?" He glanced obliquely at the little brigade adjutant.

"Oh, yes, sir. I understand, sir." Timothy went out with a sour smile on his red and rather ill favored countenance.

Meanwhile up on the drill field high above the Rhine and Coblenz, Davies labored enthusiastically with his squadron to devise a method of handling the automatic rifles in combat and on the march. It was a highly interesting problem which he finally solved by concentrating all the guns and gun crews in one platoon in each troop so that the terrifically augmented fire power of the automatic rifles should be instantly available in mass while at the same time guns and pack horses could be available for detaching with squads or sections sent on special duty.

It was while at the height of interest in these practical measures that an orderly came bearing a letter from the brigade headquarters. Opening it, Davies frowned.

"Good Lord!" he said to himself. "What is the big idea of chivvying a squadron commander around like a cadet?" But he had to leave his task and ride back to his own office and make explanation as to why he was five minutes late in arriving at the drill field.

That afternoon and the next day he waited somewhat impatiently for an answer to his letter concerning the cutting down of the enormous exactions made on the cavalry. All was silence and he fumed and stewed while his men continued on their duties, duties which interfered with their work in mastering the automatic rifles. He had already personally investigated every man in the guardhouse and returned all except three of them to duty with their troops. This aided somewhat in distributing the work, but it did not even put a dent in the big problem.

The morning of the third day dawned cold and drizzly. An order came for the squadron to turn out and escort a visiting French field marshal. The men led out their horses, with the usual bickering and wordy wrangling that always accompanied this formation.

Tiring of this, Davies raised his voice and thundered at the squadron. In no uncertain terms he told them that they sounded like a bunch of old women driving geese to market. The bickering stopped, men soberly saddled their animals and went to their places in line without a word. Here and there, on the faces of Sergeant Brady and men of his length of service, there appeared something like a look of satisfaction.

The squadron looked very dressy in its French saddles and in its whitened tie ropes. It was the first time that Davies had commanded the squadron as a whole. When the troops were reported to him, he gave the first command, "Right By Twos

—He-e-ow!" his voice ringing forth clear and musical and vibrant so that every man raised his head and every horse pricked up his ears and the squadron moved out as a whole. The men sat straight in their saddles and the horses danced a little with the freshness of the morning air.

At the Bahnhof he swung the squadron into line. As the train drew in and the visiting French field marshal, a kindly looking, middle aged man, stepped into the waiting car, Davies shouted forth the command—

"Present sabers!"

He raised his own sword in the beautiful saber salute of the officer, feeling behind him the swift rising of a wall of steel as the men carried their sabers to the salute. The trumpeters sounded off the required notes while the French officer stood at salute.

Then sabers were returned, the squadron fell in before and behind the waiting car and trotted steadily with it to the quarters of the commanding general. The rain continued to fall dispiritedly and steadily.

As the car stopped in front of the general's house, again the squadron was swung into line, again was the salute rendered and the French officer, accompanied by the commanding general and by General Stithers, and followed by their crowd of aides, went into the house.

OUTSIDE, in the rain which now had turned into a heavy downpour, sat Davies with his men. It is customary to dismiss the escorting troops, or at least to make some provision for their comfort, in cases like this; but all was silent in the house. Until he was dismissed by proper authority there was nothing for Davies to do but sit there in the pouring rain with his men and horses until some one thought of it. It seemed to Davies a criminal thing to be so callous and indifferent to the well being of men and horses. As he sat there, somewhat angrily meditating upon these things, the door of the commanding general's house suddenly opened.

Davies gave one surprised look at the person who ran out and came toward him and his squadron. Turning swiftly, he shouted to his squadron.

"Squadron — attention!" he commanded, and raised his saber to the salute.

For there, bareheaded in the rain, came the field marshal of France, the commander of the Allied Armies, the man who had led the forces of France and her Allied nations to victory against the German Empire.

"*Comme je suis désolé!*" the field marshal cried as he came nearer, and begged that Davies would immediately get his horses and men under shelter and that he would join the party inside.

Running after the field marshal came the American chief of staff and several officers, all full of solicitude for the rain drenched cavalrymen now that the field marshal had set the example.

And it was the senior field marshal of France who waited in the rain as Davies gave the necessary commands, who waited while Davies dismounted and saw the squadron trot away, and who accompanied Davies into the general's house.

And in the heart of the American major there arose a warm glow of appreciation for this simple, democratic Frenchman with his tired eyes and his kindly face who, for all his simplicity of bearing and kindliness of manner, had yet commanded a force of men such as Cæsar, Hannibal, Alexander or Napoleon had never envisaged, so vast was it. And seeing him at close hand and observing how remarkably free from arrogance, from frowning self-importance this French officer was, Davies marveled at the rather pompous, indubitably Prussian attitude of so many American officers of high rank. Certainly the democratic French methods were much more suitable to the American soldier than the teachings of Von Der Goltz. And the war had discredited the Prussian methods and proved the soundness of the French. To Davies it seemed a pity that his own general staff, who so

sedulously aped the German methods, had not seen the light and still continued in their stupidity to follow the discredited German school.

General Stithers buttonholed the marshal after a moment and Davies smiled inwardly to see the condescending and self-important air of the American general, who could not conceive of a man having great power and ability without showing it by some outward sign of overbearing arrogance.

It was while Davies stood there that the gray haired, rather absent minded commanding general came up.

"Your squadron looked very business-like, very snappy," stated the general, "but you'll have to brace up that disciplinary report. Can't have the cavalry at the foot of the list."

Davies looked at him in surprise.

"Why, General," he countered, "it is a very simple matter to brace it up as I explained in my letter."

"Yes, yes," replied the commanding general absently, for just then General Stithers, who had been hovering in the offing, broke in with some whispered remark and bore the older officer away.

Davies looked after them, a little nonplused. Certainly the commanding general did not seem very much interested. And Davies knew that his recommendations were sound and based on good military common sense.

While he stood there, despondent, Turner came up.

"Well," he remarked, "I canned your friend Lund with his schemes for carrying automatic rifles. Have you worked out something?"

"Sure; the squadron had them out at drill this morning," replied Davies easily.

"What do you think of the outfit over there by now?" went on Turner.

"Believe me, it certainly has been hammered around until the poor devils of soldiers can hardly call their souls their own. And the officers think that they are put there to dance and ride!"

"Whe-e-ew!" whistled Turner.

"I'm trying now to raise the squadron from a sort of glorified livery stable to a real combat outfit and, believe me, it's some job. Every wandering dentist's wife, brigadier general's niece and captain's sister thinks that the squadron is meant to provide her with riding horses—"

"Don't get the women down on you—they damn' near run this place," warned Turner.

And Davies swore.

"What right have women with an army of occupation?" he asked. "Their place is at home. I certainly am not going to let them worry me any."

Turner shook a dubious head.

"They can raise Cain in all sorts of devious ways if they get down on you," he warned.

Davies shrugged his shoulders, disbelieving. The commanding general was now engaged in deep conversation with the French field marshal. Both young American officers studied them.

"Did you ever read his book on war?" asked Davies.

"No."

"Well, you ought to. He believes that an army is meant for war and not for grinding out a lot of peace time regulations. He believes in '*souplesse*', the individual trained to think so that he can meet every contingency that arises. The Germans believe in rigidity and all thinking done from the top. And we follow the German model in spite of the fact that Von Kluck's drive on Paris failed because of too much rigidity and too little ability to conform to unexpected contingencies."

THE TWO broke off their conversation to watch General Stithers approach the field marshal and the commanding general.

"And your brigade commander—what does he think?" asked Turner with an amused smile.

"About him I don't know as yet. From the enormous amount of papers and orders he's issued to my poor little squadron I'm inclined to think he believes in the German system—which is to do all a

subordinate's thinking for him." Davies was very serious.

"Huh," grunted Turner. "Before you get through with him you'll think he's got Von Bernhardi, Von Der Goltz and Von Moltke backed off the map for sheer downright Prussianism."

Davies shrugged his shoulders.

"By the way—" Turner changed the subject— "don't forget you're expected to turn out with a squadron of trained machine riflemen inside of less than thirty days. Do you suppose you can do it?"

"I think so."

"It's a blame' short time, though—" Turner shook his head dubiously—"but it's got to be done. I told you that the Old Man is worried about this Communistic agitation on the Ruhr. It's beginning to show itself in our territory. They had some sort of a riot down at Cochem yesterday. And he wants his cavalry in shape to strike and strike hard if anything happens."

"I'll try to have them in shape," Davies returned quietly.

He strolled homeward in a very serious frame of mind, however. Not only did he have to brace up the disciplinary standing of the squadron in less than thirty days, but he had to turn out a unit well schooled and capable in the handling of the automatic rifles. And all this had to be done in spite of the demands of higher authority upon his time and the time of his men, who were working overtime now.

Evidently there was to be no help from the commanding general. He must get his work done in spite of almost insurmountable obstacles. So far he had returned all the prisoners to duty and relieved the tension a little; also he had taken two men away from Major Lund and his futile experiments. How to get some more men relieved from details outside the squadron?

Hurrying to his barracks, he went to the telephone, taking the list of extra and special duty men with him. Once there he called up number after number, talking with this officer and that officer, explaining the circumstances to them and asking if they could not cooperate with him. With very few exceptions they saw his viewpoint and immediately pledged him their cooperation. At the end of an hour's telephoning he had succeeded in relieving some twenty men from special duty outside the troop and had them ready and available for troop work.

With the few officers who had stood on their dignity and refused their aid in releasing the men assigned to their services, Davies used Turner's good offices, and Turner somehow, very tactfully, gained the results desired. At the end of that day nearly every special duty man was back to troop duty.

AS THE glad word of the new state of affairs spread among the men in the squadron, there was the sound of cheering in the stables and barracks. The cavalry was electrified with new life. Immediate work was started on the automatic rifles and gun teams were organized and trained and trial firing at reduced ranges was started.

Meanwhile, over at General Stithers' headquarters, Timothy was called into conference with the general and came out after half an hour, looking like an unctuous cat that had been shown the cream jug and told to help itself.

Major Timothy went from his office over to headquarters and was closeted long and confidentially with a certain lank lieutenant-colonel, who was head of the Intelligence Section, that Intelligence Section which seemed principally for use against American officers of the American forces in Germany.

Happily ignorant of all this, Davies set to work with a will, throwing himself body and soul into the work of getting his organization into shape within thirty days. Marshal Foch, in response to Davies' questions, had stated that cavalry was a highly important arm in any future war. The word ran like wildfire through the squadron. The gibes of infantry and artillery were effectually silenced. More potent still, the cavalry-

men returned after hours to their Gretas and their Annas, and the *frauleins* rejoiced with the recently emancipated horse soldiers.

Captain Bates had a lot to say, in his usual gibing fashion, deriding Davies and all his works—carefully behind his back, however. The rest of the officers in the squadron listened to him with poor grace, even Girolamo Hoe, in his slow, labored mental processes, finding himself at issue with Bates. About this time Bates' mother arrived. Bates' mother thought it would be very nice, as she confided to the other ladies at a tea party at the Coblenzer Hof, if her Bobby had command of the squadron instead of that Major Davies.

"You know, he seems to be so unpopular with the men and the officers," she confided to Mrs. Townsend, Major Townsend's wife. In Mrs. Townsend she found a willing listener.

"I think he's perfectly horrid," admitted Mrs. Townsend. "He refuses to let any of the ladies ride the troop horses any more and just when I was learning to ride so nicely!"

A chorus of condemnation of Davies broke out from all sides, every lady there adding her word.

"And besides, he's a perfect stick, never comes to the dances, never takes any of the girls out for a party, just buries himself over there at Pfaffendorf," echoed Mrs. Townsend's sister, a virgin lady of uncertain age but undeniable pulchritude.

Captain Bates' mother sat and cooed, feeding the flames whenever they seemed in danger of dying down for lack of fuel. The burden of her song was that her Bobby was so popular and would make such a good commanding officer for the squadron.

Mrs. Lund, the wife of the major who had been working so long on the new pack for the automatic rifle, added her note of criticism.

"He is terrible. My husband says—" And she regaled them with a description of Davies as seen through her husband's eyes, and all the ladies listened and shook their heads at the picture thus drawn.

"My Bobby says—" And Mrs. Bates went to bat with fire in her eye and gave them some more choice pictures.

So it went.

Meanwhile Davies worked from reveille until retreat at the squadron and went home and worked until midnight. In the first place he had an extraordinary amount of papers from Stithers' brigade headquarters to return every day. Lately Stithers' headquarters had been absolutely vicious. Davies' squadron trained on at least four different drill grounds now, what with the new work with the automatic rifles, and he could not be at all four places at once. Yet not a day passed that he did not receive a letter requiring him to explain his absence from one of his drill grounds at a certain time. This was annoying and took time. Returning all of the reports required by Stithers took up more time.

This detailed work kept Davies busy until at least ten o'clock every night. After that hour he went to work preparing a series of small problems for the squadron in field firing with the automatic rifle. Each of these had to contain some definite lesson in combat firing and cavalry tactics and each had to be made realistic and convincing.

He was billeted in the house of a German, one Herr Hempful, occupying a drawing room, bedroom and kitchen. To run his establishment Davies had engaged a cook and a maid who looked after his rooms and served his meals. Now Herr Hempful, his host, was a retired innkeeper, a man of jovial and rubicund countenance, whose passage through the common hallway invariably left a fine aroma of wine, beer and *schnapps* in his wake.

Herr Hempful, old as he was, still had a rollicking eye and a gallant soul in his fat body. Once or twice he smiled cheerfully on Davies' maid as she went about her duties. To make certain that his sentiments were understood, he followed this up by an attempt to kiss Hilda as she passed by with an armful of fresh laundry.

Indignantly Hilda reported this outrage. Davies called in Herr Hempful and requested his abstinence from such practices, speaking in English, which Herr Hempful did not understand, but in a tone of voice which Herr Hempful understood immediately. The fat ex-innkeeper bowed his way out and in five minutes his old housekeeper brought Davies a half dozen bottles of good Rhine champagne, champagne which Davies promptly returned.

Herr Hempful had been raised under the shadow of Ehrenbreitstein, which should explain why he answered a reprimand with a gift.

In a few days more the same thing occurred again. Again the indignant Hilda reported the actions of the amorous ex-innkeeper and again Davies gave him a scolding, this time talking to him in the manner of a mule skinner apostrophizing his four-line team. Again came the housekeeper, this time with a dozen bottles of very fine champagne; and again the gift was sent back.

THE RETURN of all this good liquor greatly worried Private Floyd, who acted as orderly for Major Davies.

"Believe me," he confided to Sergeant Brady, "that guy Davies needs a few drinks, the way he burns the midnight oil, and I ain't sayin' perhaps. I come off guard midnight the other night and, knowin' the major's always up, thinks I, I'll mosey by and get his saddle so's to have it ready for Saturday inspection.

"Well, I blow in the major's dump and he's sittin' typin' away with that little half size typewriter he uses.

" 'Hello, Floyd,' he says without lookin' up. 'There's a shot o' Scotch whisky in that bottle on the sideboard that won't do you any good, Floyd,' he says and taps away at this here little half portion machine.

"So I pours me a drink and, thinks I, I might as well do this saddle here and now and sleep a little longer in the mornin', so I hauls out the old Properts and the sponge and starts in, sittin' on the floor near the major's saddle rack.

"Then somebody knocks on the door and I opens it and it's Lieutenant Butcher and Lieutenant O'Connor and Lieutenant Harburg.

"They says as how they was comin' home from the dance at the Officers' Casino and, seein' his light, decides to come and say hello.

"The major gives 'em the glad hand and turns around to me.

" 'If you haven't killed all that Scotch, Floyd,' he says, 'how about trottin' out the dear remains and doin' the honors for the establishment?' he says, which I does, *pronto*, and none of 'em is bashful about polishin' off the major's good Scotch and I returns to the saddle, not havin' finished the stirrup leathers yet.

"Well, they bellyache back and forth a little while; then Lieutenant O'Connor, he speaks up and begins to bawl out the major for stayin' up so late every night.

" 'You had ought to get to bed earlier, Major,' he says. 'You'll ruin yourself by losin' your sleep all the time thisaway; you're beginnin' to show it now, Major,' he says. 'You got black circles under your eyes and you're gettin' pale and peaked lookin'.'

"The rest of 'em all backs O'Connor up in this.

" 'There ain't enough hours in the day and night to do all that I've got to do,' says the major, thoughtful-like.

" 'Well, what do you do it for, Major?' asks O'Connor.

" 'What do I do it for?' The major is kinda dreamy in his answer. 'I do it because, because I gotta keep several jumps ahead o' the men I'm commandin',' he says. 'A corporal oughta know more'n a private,' he says, 'and a sergeant oughta know more'n a corporal, and a major oughta know more'n the whole damn' squadron put together,' he says. 'It's like that fresh young feller asked the old horseman what was the secret o' trainin' horses,' he says. 'The old guy squirted out a stream o' tobacco juice and looks at the young feller a long time. I'll tell

you, son, says the old fellow, the secret o' trainin' horses is that the man has gotta know more'n the horse.'

"The lieutenants looks kinda puzzled at this and the major goes on:

" 'It's my idea,' he says, 'that the marks o' rank a officer wears on his shoulders oughta be a indication of the brains he has above his ears. When we achieve that,' he says, 'we'll have a fine army.'

" 'But there ain't no use ruinin' your health tryin' to do it all in a few nights,' says O'Connor.

" 'No,' says the major, studyin' his empty glass kinda thoughtful. 'No, I guess you're right, especially when it's all for these here ungrateful soldiers,' he says, lookin' at the empty bottle kinda hard, 'that comes around and drinks up all your liquor,' he says, 'so's you don't have none to offer when somebody comes callin' on you,' he says.

"You see he's hittin' at me, but I'm tellin' you, Sarge, I ain't had only a drink or two, maybe three the hull day. But all the same I see the fix he's in and I sets my brain to workin'."

"Your *what?*" asked Sergeant Brady with immense surprise.

"My brain," continued Floyd patiently. "And jest about that time I hears the wobbling footsteps o' old Herr Hempful, that booze histin' Heinie whose house the major is billeted in.

"Quick as a flash, I says, 'Major,' I says, 'Herr Hempful's been tryin' to kiss Hilda again,' I says.

" 'Is *that* so!' the major bangs back, mad as a wet hen. 'I'm gettin' sick of that pestiferous bird annoyin' my servants,' he says. 'Call him in here,' he says, which I does.

"Boy! You should 'a' heard the major light into him. He told that rum sprinkled Heinie things about himself which he'd never even imagined before. Old Herr Hempful, he don't know what's it's all about, it bein' in English, but his conscience ain't any too good and he bows and rubs his hands and says, '*Ja wohl! Herr* Major, *ja wohl,*' until the major chases him out.

"I goes outside and waits and sure enough, in five minutes here comes Herr Hempful, pushin' and tuggin' at a case o' wet goods, the same bein' very fine Rhine champagne, about two dozen bottles strong. Puttin' a few bottles of it behind the kitchen sink as kinda a reserve for my own use, I drags in the rest and tells the major that I found some wine for him and he's tickled pink.

"They're talkin' about German army discipline when I come back with the champagne.

" 'You see what I mean,' says the major, pointin' to the champagne. 'Here's Floyd, a pretty good example of an American soldier. He's a man that can think for hisself,' says the major. 'Take a man that can go out and scare up six bottles o' good Rhine wine—' "

"Six, was it?" interrupted Sergeant Brady. "I thought the squarehead loosened up on two dozen bottles?"

"Well, that ain't the point o' the story," continued Floyd with dignity, "and the major says, 'Take a man like that and German discipline ain't for him. German discipline is for Germans,' he says, 'and not for Americans,' he says, 'and that's what's the trouble with our army,' he says, 'that we borrowed a lot of foolishness from Baron Steuben, meant for Prussian grenadiers in 1770,' he says, 'and we go on tryin' to ram 'em down the throats of American citizens in 1920. And the collar don't fit the horse,' he says, 'and when a collar don't fit a horse,' he says, 'you change the collar, but,' he says, 'the military authorities go on tryin' to change the American neck,' he says, 'and they turned millions o' men back into civil life that don't like the army,' he says, 'and that hurts the national defense,' he says.

" 'But the Germans make pretty good wine,' says Lieutenant O'Connor, sniffin' up another glassful.

" 'Yes,' says the major, 'but you know damn' well you'd turn down a whole barrel of German wine in favor of just one good bottle of Four Roses rye!'

" 'You said it, Major,' says Lieutenant O'Connor."

TO DAVIES, intent upon getting the squadron in shape and in having it come clean in the automatic rifle shooting, there occurred no suspicion of General Stithers' virulent animosity. Only, in the pause of his duties, it seemed to the hard working major that he was being checked up upon rather minutely. This feeling slowly deepened into the uncomfortable certainty that his every action was watched and reported.

It was not a pleasant feeling and he was at a loss to account for the malice shown in such hostile surveillance. It was slowly borne in upon him that did he make a single false step he would be punished swiftly and mercilessly. And it is very easy to make false steps in the American Army, weighted down as it is with thousands of minute and particular regulations, the violation of any one of which can be seized upon by higher authority if higher authority really is intent upon being unpleasant.

Under such circumstances he had to work far into the night, complying with all of Stithers' demands for papers and more papers.

It was Turner, calling upon him late one night, who warned him that he was overdoing.

"You're beginning to show the strain, old top," stated Turner, his voice solicitous. "Better lay off awhile, or you'll get a spill and be laid up on sick report."

Davies shook his head wearily.

"Can't do it," he returned. "Look at the stuff I've got to do tonight. Here is the regular batch of papers from the War Department." He pointed to a sheaf of printed orders, new regulations, changes in regulations and amendments to changes in regulations that the War Department grinds out regularly and constantly. "Here is the batch of stuff from your headquarters—" and he pointed to a sheaf of mimeographed matter, regulations and changes in regulations for the American forces in Germany— "and here is General Stithers' stuff. I thought the war would cure the Army of paper work, but it has only increased it."

"I know it," nodded Turner, "and blamed if I see why. It gets worse and worse."

"I see why," asserted Davies. "The Army is topheavy with rank, all in excess of its needs, and the extra officers are all busy trying to justify their existences by writing reams of orders."

"Oh, I disagree with you there. We haven't enough officers to go around."

"So the unthinking say. But look here —into how many combat divisions is the Army organized?"

"Oh, about seven or eight," returned Turner vaguely.

"And we have about eighteen major-generals, ten more major-generals than there are commands for. How many regiments have we?"

"About one hundred and twenty," guessed Turner.

"And we have three hundred and forty-six colonels to command them, also three hundred and ninety-six lieutenant-colonels, also twelve hundred and sixty majors, a total of about fifteen hundred field officers in excess of combat needs. Ours is probably the only Army in the world that has three field officers on the staff to one in the line. In other words, for every field officer actually in command of men and guns and horses we have three healthy field officers sitting back with the typewriter batteries, legislating their fool heads off. No wonder the Army is cursed with papers! The proportion would be all right if battles were won with battalions of commas and regiments of semicolons, but nobody yet has succeeded in winning a battle that way."

There was a knock at the door and, on Davies' invitation to open, a soldier came in and saluted.

"A note from the sergeant-major, sir," he announced, and handed a sealed envelope to Davies.

"What the dickens is the sergeant-major sending notes around for at this time of night?" asked Davies, plainly puzzled, as he broke open the seal.

Reading the note, he frowned and looked absently into the air for a space. Then he dismissed the soldier, telling him to carry his thanks to the sergeant-major.

"Look here—" Davies passed over the message to Turner. Turner read it and looked up, nodding.

"That's what I came over to see you about," he stated and looked again at the message, written in the careful hand of the acting squadron sergeant-major. The message read:

> Sir,—Major Timothy has been over here since eight o'clock this evening going through all the troop records and papers. I thought I'd let the major know.

Davies looked disgusted.

"Tomorrow I'll get a letter calling upon me for explanation as to why Lieutenant Butcher didn't initial the issue of an extra pair of socks, woolen, to Private Grubinsky, as required in Special Regulations 178, Paragraph 3, amended by Paragraph X Special Regulations No. 576. What was it the Padre said in 'Stalky and Company'? 'It's a belittling life, my friend, a belittling life.' "

Turner's face was thoughtful.

"They are on your trail, old boy," he stated.

"Who are?" Davies looked unconvinced.

"Stithers and his crew."

Davies shook his head.

"All right. Believe it or not. But watch your step, and that isn't all. Tell me something—has your old cook left and a new cook come to replace her?"

"Why, yes." Davies looked surprised.

"Well, look out for the new cook. She's getting pay from other sources than your pocket to report on every move you make."

"Turner—" Davies started to laugh—"you're crazy as a bedbug."

"Maybe so, maybe so—" Turner shook his head— "but I got a quiet tip from a young captain in the Intelligence, some bird that used to be a soldier under you on the Border. I tell you, Stithers means to get you and get you good."

"I can't believe it," Davies returned after a moment's silence. "Here I am working night and day to turn out a squadron for him that will reflect credit to his brigade. I am personally loyal to him as my commanding officer and I have lectured my officers on the necessity of being loyal to him whatever they think of his policies. I can't believe that a man would be so petty and mean as to attempt anything like that."

"Believe it or not, Dave, facts are facts. And one thing more—look out for your senior captain, that fellow Bates. If you are relieved from command he will be squadron commander. And he would spend very little time in weeping if you were relieved from command. While you are here working all night he is out dancing with all the wives of the generals and the staff and dropping a hint here and a hint there that all is not well with the squadron. And his mother is buzzing around whispering the same thing. And the women all believe him; they are sore because you interrupted their riding lessons."

"What a cheerful little Job's comforter you are, Turner." Davies smiled wearily. "Haven't you any more bad news to spill?"

Turner rose very swiftly and put his arm over Davies' shoulder.

"Dave, old top," he said, "most of us are rooting for you. All the cavalry officers on the staff know that you are doing fine work over here and that the squadron is pulling up by leaps and bounds. You've got some friends at court, even if you don't know it."

"Awfully nice," said Davies, a little bitterly, "but a hard working officer shouldn't need friends at court. It's just that word court that describes the situation. This place is like a royal court with its courtiers, its favorites, its women and its spies. It's not American, it's European, and a dam' poor imitation of European customs at that."

"Yes," Turner admitted thoughtfully, "it is. Personally I think it's the medieval atmosphere of the place."

"You said it. It's the shadow of Ehrenbreitstein," said Davies.

CHAPTER IV

MILITARY PROCEDURE

THE CHEERFUL clang of the horseshoer's hammer came from the forge which occupied the shed at the far end of the stable yard. *Clang-clang-clang!* went the hammer, and the man wielding it sent out a refrain on the hot iron, doubling the beat at regular intervals so that the ringing notes kept time to some tune the man hummed as he worked.

It was feeding time and impatient horses whinnied and stamped as men broke out great bales of fragrant hay and carried the whispering, rustling armfuls to each animal.

Corporal Matson's squad was busy grooming. Sergeant Brady sauntered by.

"How come you-all sweatin' out here this time o' day?" he asked.

Matson knocked his brush against his currycomb and straightened up.

"Well, Brady, you see it's like this. The major gives us the highest ratin' on drill and inspection, everything 'ceptin' the condition of our horses. So these birds in my squad gets together and decides to show up these other squads by groomin' extry every afternoon."

Brady laughed.

"By jeez," he said, "that Major Davies is dumb. Yep, he's dumb like a fox. Here he's got you fatheads workin' about twice as hard as you did before—and makin' you like it. How come?"

"How come?"

Matson was indignant, but a little puzzled at the same time. He frowned in an effort to express his idea of the changed conditions in the squadron.

"You see, it's like this," he explained laboriously. "These guys don't have to do this here extra stuff less'n they want to, but so long as he's pickin' out the best squad every Saturday and givin' 'em a twenty-four hour pass this squad o' mine don't aim to trail along with the also-rans. Not on your tintype, it don't!" And Matson looked much relieved to have provided explanation based upon purely selfish grounds.

"How's Major Davies and Stithers gettin' on now?" asked Matson curiously.

"They ain't!" Brady was brief. "Stithers hates him like the devil hates holy water. They're goin' to lock horns over Lieutenant Butcher this afternoon."

"You mean that riot down here in the stable yard? I seen Stithers from the barracks. He was rampin' around like all possessed. What was eatin' him?"

"Oh, it seems his High and Mightiness ordered his horse saddled and ready at ten o'clock. Lieutenant Butcher, who's actin' squadron adjutant, gets the message and sends it to Stithers' orderly. Stithers' orderly is downtown somewhere with the keys to the box he keeps the general's equipment in. Before they can find the orderly and get the keys it takes near an hour and in the meantime here comes Stithers breathin' fire and brimstone and threatenin' to try everybody by court-martial."

"What was he sayin' to Lieutenant Butcher? I seen Butcher's face and, believe me, he was white as a sheet."

"Yeh, the general talked to him somethin' scandalous. Didn't give him a chance to say nothin'. Then Stithers bangs away, shoutin' that he's goin' to have court - martial charges preferred against Butcher. Major Davies is out to the automatic rifle practise while this is goin' on. He comes in and hears the story. Now he's gone pastin' over to the general's headquarters. Believe me, there'll be some fur flyin' over thataway or I miss my guess."

"Stithers is an ornery bum. I hope he don't trip old Davies. He ain't such a bad guy, that Davies. I'd like to hear how it comes out."

"I'm goin' to mosey over and *habla* with Jenkins. He's sergeant-major over there at Stithers' headquarters and he'll give me the dope."

"Let me know what you hear, will you?" shouted Matson after him. Brady nodded.

THE WORD went around the cavalry squadron that Davies was over in the lion's den beard-ing the lion himself on account of Lieutenant Butcher. Men stopped work and discussed the matter, meanwhile waiting for the news.

Little knots of them gathered here and there, talking over the thing in all its ramifications. They were as one in damning Stithers freely and picturesquely.

"Do you notice how the M. P's been layin' off us since Major Davies took over?" asked one man.

Several of them nodded.

"Do you know why? I know. Tuesday night I was strollin' down Bahnhoffstrasse with a *fraulein* and that Barker out o' the Quartermaster Corps who's been made an M. P, he comes up to me nasty as hell and asks me don't I know it ain't allowed to parade around the street with loose women. I gets mad as hell, for the *fraulein* I'm with is the daughter of old Schmidt down here that runs the dry goods store and as straight as a string. She don't savvy much English, but she's a good kid. I kinda gives Barker a callin' down, and what does he do but yank me in before the provost. Right away the provost has Davies telephoned for. Seems that Davies makes 'em do that when one of the cavalry is picked up. And the major is over there quicker'n a flash. He sees this guy Barker, he asks about the girl, he talks to me and first thing I know he's givin' Barker hell and says he's goin' to write a letter askin' for his relief and I'm yanked out o' jail by the slack o' my pants. Now the M. P's is kinda careful about who they pick up from this here outfit."

A murmur of approval ran around the group.

"And that ain't all. I'm workin' in the saddle room the other day and him and Captain Bates comes in, talkin' about some guy.

" 'Shall I put him in the guardhouse, Major?' asks Bates.

" 'Hell, no!' the major comes back. 'Every time you put a man in the guardhouse,' he says, 'you confess failure,' he says. 'The Government don't give us men to put in the guardhouse,' he says. 'It gives men to make into soldiers,' he says. 'An officer's job is to make fightin' men out of civilians,' he says, 'not to make guardhouse bums outa them.'

" 'But how about discipline?' asks Bates.

" 'No discipline worth a tinker's dam ever came outa the guardhouse,' says the major. 'The right sort o' discipline comes from pride in a man's job and self-respect,' says the major, 'an' a guardhouse ain't no place to look for pride and self-respect, leastways not unless guardhouses has changed a lot in the past week. This here squadron had twenty men in the guardhouse when I come here,' he says, 'and did you have any discipline? You did not,' he says. 'You had the lowest disciplinary report in the A. F. in G!' "

"Atten—shun!" Corporal Matson's voice rang out from near the entrance to the stable yard.

Davies did not notice that the yard was uncommonly full of soldiers for this time of day. Dismounting from his horse, he gave the reins to the orderly and returned the salute of the men standing stiffly at attention.

The men, with eyes to the front, still noticed that Davies' usual smile of greeting was lacking, that his face was white and that his eyes were angry.

Then as he called "Rest!" and they relaxed again, they noticed that he smiled at them, but it was not much more than an attempt at a smile, quickly erased as he strode into the office and closed the door behind him.

"Must have been hell popping over there," they agreed.

Several minutes later Sergeant Brady returned.

He was immediately buttonholed by Matson and several others.

"Yes, there was hell poppin'," he stated. "The major comes in and asked Major Timothy if he can see the general. 'The general is interviewing Lieutenant

Butcher now,' says Timothy with that smirk of his.

" 'That's what I came to see him about,' says Davies, and goes to the door and walks in. He leaves the door open and Sergeant Jenkins hears and sees everything.

"The general stares at Davies, lookin' unfriendly as hell.

" 'What do you want?' barks Stithers.

" 'I understand there's some disciplinary action bein' takin' with one o' my subordinates,' says Davies, cool as a cucumber, 'an' I come over to see about it.'

"Then the general goes ravin' mad and cusses and raises Cain, his eyes as vicious as a rattlesnake's. He tells Davies that when he wants him he'll send for him. Meantime Lieutenant Butcher is standin' up there sayin' nothing. Suddenly Major Davies leans across the general's desk.

" 'General,' he says, his voice tinklin' like ice in a glass, 'it is my understanding, sir, that a commandin' officer is responsible for his subordinates. Lieutenant Butcher is my adjutant and I request opportunity to investigate the complaint you have against him before any action is taken in the matter.'

"The general freezes up and gets deadly quiet. Then he calls the sergeant-major.

" 'Sergeant-major,' he says, 'write out a set of general court-martial charges for gross neglect of duty under the 96th Article o' War,' he says, 'and leave the space for the name and rank of the accused blank,' he says.

" 'Now—' he turns to Davies— 'if you're so anxious to accept responsibility for your subordinates, maybe you'd like me to have your name written in those charges,' and the general's voice is sarcastic as hell. He expects Davies to crawl out of it. But he don't know Davies.

"The major straightens out like a whiplash and comes right back at him without battin' an eye.

" 'Yes, General,' he says, 'if you consider the incident merits general court-martial proceedings I have to request that my name be put in there instead of Mr. Butcher's.'

"This almost stumps the general, but he can't back out now.

" 'Very well,' he says. 'Sergeant-major,' he says, 'put in Major Davies' name in that set of charges and have it ready for my signature immediately,' he says." Sergeant Brady came to the end of his recital.

"And you mean to say Stithers is goin' to put the major before a general court all on account of his horse bein' ten minutes late?" asked an incredulous voice from the group of soldiers.

"You said it, bo. That's exactly what's goin' to happen."

ALONE in his office, Davies sat staring into space for a long time. He wondered, after all, whether he had acted correctly in the matter. Certainly a brigadier-general could prefer charges against any of his subordinate officers did he choose. At the same time it violated one of the most fundamental principles of command and organization, which is that each subchief should be allowed full command of his group, not only to train but to discipline. Stithers should have taken up the matter with Davies and allowed him to investigate and take his own measures.

Davies was not feeling any too pleased over the prospect of a trial by court-martial. A military court-martial is very fair and just, as a general thing, as he well knew. But the mere fact that an officer had been tried by court-martial went on the officer's efficiency record, whether he had been found innocent or not, and word went forth throughout the Army that So-and-So had been tried for something, the informant never in any case spreading the word that he had been tried for a trivial cause and found blameless. The mere act of facing a court-martial brought its penalty. There the ugly fact stood and acted to prejudice an officer in his relations with his fellow officers.

Glancing down at the desk before him, he saw some of the notes he had made the

previous night on the problems for automatic rifle fire.

They had been written in the heat of enthusiasm. In the cold light of day they still read well. Unconsciously he followed the typed lines and he began to read with quickened interest.

> The automatic rifle corrects the one disability that has been inherent in cavalry, which was its diminished fire power due to the necessity of leaving so many of its men with the led horses. Increase in the rate and volume of fire permitted by the automatic rifle counterbalances this loss. The automatic rifle has put a sting in the tail of cavalry . . .

On and on he read, Stithers forgotten, the impending court-martial forgotten, the time forgotten as in imagination he constructed pictures of the cavalry of the future, light, highly mobile squadrons, plentifully equipped with automatic rifles and ammunition, its distant reconnaissance work taken over by the Air Service, its high mobility and fearful fire power utilized in seizing bridge heads, river crossings and strong points, far in advance of its toiling infantry, and holding them until the foot soldiers arrived.

It had grown too dark to read and he sat there with his dreams, forgetting the annoyance and the hampering caused by his immediate commander and remembering nothing except that he was a cavalry officer and had an opportunity to work out experiments that would be of immense value to his Army.

There was a knock on his door and, on his invitation to enter, several officers of the squadron filed in. Even as he switched on the light he noticed the absence of Captain Bates, of Captain Hoe and of Lieutenant Greffinger.

There was a moment's silence while they looked at one another.

Finally O'Connor spoke up.

"Major, we just wanted you to know that we think it's a rotten shame the way you've been treated and we would like to do something to help out."

Something akin to a faint glow came to Davies and warmed him up and made the world seem a better place. Here were at least some of his officers coming and giving him their support.

"That's awfully decent of you," he said, "but don't let my temporary difficulties worry you. You can best help by tucking heart and soul into getting the squadron in shape and hammering out a wonderful record with these new rifles. The more of your cooperation I can get, the easier the task is for us all."

"The squadron is in finer shape today than it has ever been, and I've been with it since its organization," spoke up one of the lieutenants, "and my sergeant says the men are spreading the word all over Coblenz that it's the finest outfit they ever soldiered with."

"Fine! We know that, but the disciplinary report doesn't show it yet. We've got to make it a matter of record."

"Major, we're laying awake nights trying to figure out ways we can pull together with you," remarked the serious eyed little Harburg.

Before Davies could reply the door opened slowly. The red face and the small, rather shifty eyes of Major Timothy, the brigade adjutant, peered in.

"Yes?" Davies' voice held a note of inquiry.

All eyes were turned upon the newcomer. No one smiled at him, no one greeted him, the air was decidedly hostile and unfriendly, but the little major came in nevertheless.

"I was just looking around," he explained. "Don't let me bother you." He slid into a chair.

"You don't bother us a bit, Major," asserted O'Connor with immense emphasis. A chuckle went around the group.

"Well," announced Davies, in a very matter of fact tone, "that business concluded, we might as well be on our way. That's all, gentlemen."

The officers filed out. Davies took up cap and riding crop and followed them. No one looked at Timothy sitting there in lonely state. The affront to a less thick skinned officer would have been unbearable, but Timothy minded it not one whit.

The way to the cavalry officers' mess led past Davies' house. He walked along with the group until he arrived in front of his own door and then invited them in for a cocktail before dinner.

Scarcely were they in his living room and comfortably seated, before O'Connor, who had stood by the window, called to them. Rising, they all peered out. There, gazing up curiously at the house from the other side of the street, stood Major Timothy.

"The dirty little sneak!" whispered O'Connor.

"The dirty little sneak!" echoed the rest of them, all except Davies, who, busied with the ingredients for a cocktail, was in the dining room.

THERE was little time to reflect upon the espionage system of General Stithers. There were only two days left in which to do the final garrison instruction work on the automatic rifles. New and disquieting rumors of the Communistic activities in the Ruhr and of the revolutionary troubles in Germany were coming in daily. It was necessary to hurry. The squadron speeded up its preparations to take the field. It was ordered to march to a small town some eighteen kilometers away where the final field practise and firing tests were to be held.

The squadron had snapped into a smoothly running organization, each section and squad and platoon articulating smoothly into the harmonious whole, so that there was no friction and no lost motion and much contentment. An enormous amount of work was accomplished daily without strain on tempers or physiques. The barrage of reports and returns demanded of the squadron commander increased rather than diminished. His goings and comings, his every action, were watched and reported upon, so that he grew weary of the interminable "explain by indorsement hereon" that met his eye with each morning's batch of paper.

Orders came from Stithers' office to march on the Saturday morning following.

The morning of the day of the march dawned clear and bracing. There was much intense activity around the stable yards. According to custom, Davies had the wagons loaded the night before and they were out and away while the squadron was lining up. Despite his weariness, Davies' eye kindled as he saw the two troops line up in businesslike fashion, the saddles packed for field service and men equipped for the march.

Concentrated as a platoon in each troop were the automatic rifles, snugly stowed on the pack horses, each led by a mounted trooper. It was a very neat pack that the saddlers had devised, one from which guns and ammunition could quickly be drawn for action.

Before he had time to make his inspection of the squadron, General Stithers and Major Timothy drove into the stable yard and dismounted from the limousine they occupied.

The two officers, scarcely returning Davies' salute as he called the squadron to attention, walked along through the ranks, inspecting rigorously with notebook and pencil in hand. It took them some twenty minutes, during which time horses fidgeted and men grew weary of standing at attention.

At last they finished the inspection, the two looking almost disappointed that they had found nothing.

"All right, move out!" ordered Stithers curtly.

"If you don't mind, General, I'd like to look over some of the packs first," requested Davies.

Stithers nodded and the two left. Davies gave his men "at ease" and went through the ranks, inspecting saddles and packs. In his inspection he found six bits improperly adjusted, four or five saddle blankets badly set, and three saddles wrongly packed, all of which things would have resulted very likely in wastage of horseflesh on the march. He wondered at the self-important inspection of the general and his aide who, for all

the fuss they made, had seen nothing of these important things.

It occurred to him again to wonder what had become of the court-martial charges which were to have been preferred against him. Upon reflection he decided that the general was holding them up until his return from the field firing, so as to insure that the automatic rifle practise should not be interrupted.

This was depressing, but he shook off the feeling of disquiet that it caused and sounded forth the command to mount up. There was a sudden flurry of movement, horses danced around, men heaved themselves into the saddles, ranks were straightened out and the whole squadron stood silent and waiting.

"Right forward—fours right—march!" commanded Davies, and the right troop broke forward into column of fours, the acting color sergeant galloped forward into place with the squadron standard and the column moved out at a walk from the stable yard into the street.

"Right by twos—march!" Davies' voice rang out again and the column of fours lengthened out and extended into column of twos.

The trample of the steel shod hoofs of two hundred horses echoed and reechoed in the narrow, cobblestone streets and made pleasant music in Davies' ears. Looking backward over the undulating column of businesslike olive drab and bronze, he wondered to how many cavalcades of horsemen these medieval streets had given passage and tried to visualize how they must have looked. Back in ancient days the Roman cavalry had swept through the town, flashing in horsehair plumes and bronze armor, followed in later days by the solid tramp of the heavy horses of medieval chivalry; to be succeeded in still more modern times by the scarlet dolmans and silver embroidered *pelisse* of the *chasseurs* of Napoleon, still later to be followed by the black and silver of the Death's Head Hussars of the kaiser.

The street was shadowed by the bulk of Ehrenbreitstein overhead, but his squadron moved forward steadily until it hit the sunlight of the open country. And Davies' heart lifted with the joy of it, the feel of two hundred fighting men behind him, the sound of the silken National standard whipping softly in the breeze, the sight of the scarlet and white guidons streaming at the head of each troop, the cheerful hum and talk and laughter of men at "route order", the clink of sabers and spurs and bit chains, all the steady sound of marching cavalry.

But the cheerful talk and laughter suddenly stilled itself. A wave of silence came traveling up from the rear of the column, silence broken by the shouted command, "Squadron—attention!" and there was the sound of an automobile horn in the stillness, the rush of a large military car passing, a glimpse of General Stithers' profile behind the silk curtains and the flash of a single red star of a brigadier general above the number plate in the rear.

"Route order," was given once more, but the sunlight looked less bright, the air felt less intoxicating, men's voices grew hushed.

THE MEN began to talk once more as the dust subsided and the car passed out of sight on the road ahead.

The squadron sergeant-major and Sergeant Brady, who acted as color sergeant, were talking immediately behind Davies.

"Did you read the *Amaroc* this mornin'?" asked Brady, the *Amaroc* being the daily newspaper published by the American forces in Germany.

"I *did* not. Fat lotta time I had to read the *Amaroc* with all the squadron headquarters stuff to get out."

"Aw, you and your squadron headquarters stuff!" Brady grunted disdainfully. "Anybody would think, to hear you talk, you was runnin' a whole Army corpse, 'stead o' goldbrickin' around doin' plain and fancy bunk fatigue twenty-eight hours outa the twenty-four. You'd ought to keep up with the news a whole lot better'n what you do, seein' a guy

don't have to get outa bed to read the paper!"

"Yeah? Maybe so, but that don't alter the fact none that if hot air was melody you'd be the combined field music of a brigade. But what's so important about the *Amaroc* this morning?" the squadron sergeant-major inquired.

As Davies listened to what was said, it suddenly occurred to him that he had not read the paper that morning and half turned his head, the better to hear what the color sergeant had to say.

"Oh, nothin' so much, 'ceptin' the Communists sure are raisin' hell down in the Ruhr. A hull gang of 'em went on the loose armed with machine guns and rifles and bombs and raised particular Ned. And what's more, I think they're goin' to be up here sassin' us before long."

"That's a lotta hooey! How they goin' to get up here in the first place and what chance they got sassin' us after they get here?" The sergeant-major was definitely skeptical.

"Well, there's a gang of 'em hangs out at Schneider's café under Ehrenbreitstein. What's to prevent them guys from the Ruhr gettin' together with them babies and plantin' a few bombs under the old fort and histin' a few good American doughboys into kingdom come?"

"What would they gain by it?" The sergeant-major was still skeptical, only not quite so decided in his tone.

"What would they gain by it? What wouldn't they gain by it? Them buckaroos is after trouble, plenty of it, all the time. The more they can mix things up with the Allies and Germany the more chances they got to pull a real, man sized revolution 'stead o' the half portion affair they're stagin' now."

The sergeant-major reflected over this for the length of time it took the steadily trotting squadron to cover some fifty yards more of road.

"Mebbe so. Mebbe there's truth in what you say, if but little," he admitted judiciously, "but I don't believe them birds has got the guts to stage anything."

"Don't let 'em fool you, my boy, don't let 'em fool you." Brady was tolerance itself. "Why, listen here! You know that dizzy, black haired cluck who hangs out with Schneider?"

"You mean that goofy eyed, thick waisted Gretchen with a face like an accident lookin' for a place to happen?" The sergeant-major always insisted upon exactness.

"That's her." Brady was cautious. "She ain't no Venus, exactly, and she sure can talk the hind leg off'n a box car, but she's got a good heart. Her and me kinda pals up every time I go to Schneider's and if it's long after payday she slips me an extra bottle or two o' Rhine wine and don't charge for it."

"It's your fatal gift o' beauty," remarked the sergeant-major.

"Yeh," admitted Brady without any false modesty, "but yesterday while I'm sittin' there havin' a snifter or two before taps this here mad cluck up and tells me somethin' kinda queer."

"Yeah? I suppose she tells you she ain't never been kissed before. They all pull that," spoke up the sergeant-major out of the depths of a vast experience. "With her face I ain't doubtin' she told the truth, but go on with your tale o' woe."

"Well, she up and tells me that these here Communists are stronger in Coblenz than a hunk o' Limberger cheese in a hot house. The Americans bein' kinda easy goin', they've been driftin' in here pretty frequent until there's a couple hundred of 'em, so this skirt tells me. And she says moreover, what I can piece together out o' her rush o' words to the mouth, that they're figgerin' on pullin' some rough stuff the first chance they get. And most o' them birds is ex-soldiers."

"A couple a hundred of 'em ain't goin' to do much damage," commented the sergeant-major.

"No? What's to prevent 'em waitin' till some time all of our outfit are one side o' the river at a inspection or review or somethin' and then bombin' that bridge o' boats and raisin' merry hell on the other

side while our guys sits on the opposite bank and looks foolish?"

"By jeez! They could make a smell at that!" The sergeant major was perturbed at last.

"Well, that's exactly the plan they got under their hats accordin' to what this wall eyed female tells me. It ain't such a dumb plan at that."

And Davies, trotting ahead, had to agree. It wasn't such a dumb plan at that.

It suddenly occurred to Davies as he rode along, that now was an excellent time to strike if the Communists meant mischief. The infantry was down somewhere near Andernach engaged in maneuvers, the artillery was engaged in firing some problems at their range nearly twenty kilometers from Coblenz, and here he was with the cavalry steadily increasing the distance between himself and the city. And there was little in Coblenz except a few quartermaster and special service troops and a few military police, not nearly enough men to cope with any serious uprising.

But what was the American Intelligence Service doing all this time if these things were true? It was their business to run down just such stuff as this, to keep their ears to the ground and report any movements among the population of the occupied territory. Were they so busy reporting soldiers for having their blouses unbuttoned or failing to salute that they lost sight of their real duties? Davies shrugged his shoulders. It was not unlikely, he reflected. At the same time he must do his duty and warn General Stithers, his brigade commander, at the first opportunity, giving him the information that he had overheard by chance.

CHAPTER V

THE PROTECTION OF COBLENZ

IT WAS no comfort to Davies to realize that General Stithers would be awaiting the squadron on its arrival. If there is one time that men should be bothered least it is at the time of arriving in camp after a march. And knowing Stithers, Davies knew that the man was constitutionally incapable of letting subordinates alone. His was not an uncommon type in the American Army—men who wore the eagles of a colonel or the stars of a general on their shoulders, but who in their hearts were nothing more than squad leaders, incapable of allowing subordinate commanders to handle their own organizations.

A smaller minded man than Davies would have been irritated by Stithers' fussiness. For he was there, he and Major Timothy, on the arrival of the squadron, with orders for everything ready and waiting. The horse lines were to be in certain places, the forage piles in a predetermined spot, men were to be billeted thus and so, so that there was little for Davies to do except give the command to dismount.

That the horse lines were placed so that men had to go all across the camp and billet to water, that the forage was so placed as to cause twice the trouble and labor were facts that bred annoyance, but were not necessarily fatal, reasoned Davies, being more anxious to get at the shooting than he was to quibble over small matters.

As quickly as his men were busy caring for their horses, Davies approached General Stithers.

"I overheard some information today that might or might not be important," he stated and went on to tell Stithers of the conversation between his color sergeant and the sergeant major.

Stithers listened impassively until he had finished.

"Is that all?" he asked.

Davies nodded.

"Well, Major, if you'll look after your squadron, we'll let the proper authorities handle the other matters," said Stithers in the manner of one chiding a very small boy for his forwardness.

Davies flushed slightly.

"Very well, sir," he replied and, saluting, returned to his men, who were busy preparing their camp.

They were situated on the edge of one of the German national forests. Tall men in gray-green uniforms, wearing pheasant feathers in their jaunty felt hats, came out and watched the Americans curiously. They were the foresters, men picked for their high records in the army, excellent shots and woodsmen. From these men had been recruited the *Jaeger* regiments of the Imperial army. Davies was surprised to observe that they still wore the Imperial eagle on their uniforms.

He was billeted in the cottage of the chief forester, an unsmiling man of much grave dignity who had been an *Unteroffizier* in one of the kaiser's *Jaeger* regiments.

Happily General Stithers and Major Timothy departed in the late afternoon to return to Coblenz, and Davies threw himself into the plans for the work on the morrow.

He was given ten days in which to complete his firing. Of these ten days he allotted five days to the squads, two to the sections, and one day each to the platoons, troops and squadron.

The field firing range was a shallow valley, broken by woods and a stream and crossed by several roads. Target pits had been dug by infantry detachments. Before he went to bed that night Davies had his targets, heavy cardboard silhouettes in olive drab paper as large as a man, set up in the points he selected.

Early the next morning the range details were made, ammunition was issued to the rifle squads and they moved out beyond the entrance to the valley, each squad leader waiting his turn.

Davies had all his problems thought out in advance and had succeeded in making them very practical.

It was now that his hard work began to bear fruit, for not only were the men keen about the work but they tore great sections out of the targets and handled the guns smoothly and well.

Every day General Stithers' car came sliding up and Stithers and his brigade adjutant stood for an hour, silently watching. Neither made any comment and Davies could not determine whether they approved or disapproved. As a matter of fact, he did not worry much about it. He knew his business and knew that he was working along the right lines.

Turner came out once or twice and marveled at the interest the men were showing.

"Lord!" he snorted. "You'd think it was big league baseball the way they bellyache and argue. I've watched all the firing on this range and I've never seen men so interested. By the by, may I have a copy of those problems you're working out? Want to send them in to the general staff. Thanks."

The problems were varied to include every duty that cavalry would be called upon to perform—advance guard, rear guard, outpost, patrolling. They thoroughly tested out the corporal's ability to handle his little group of men under combat conditions and to direct the fire of his riflemen. At the end of the five days Davies had developed a keen group of gun teams in the squadron, led by men who could use their heads to outguess an enemy force.

The problems for the sergeants became slightly more complicated. They had two squads to maneuver and the fire of two guns to direct. They also had to worry more over the protection of their larger number of led horses and to take security measures. Their ranges were increased and the number of their targets multiplied.

It was the first time that most of the non-commissioned officers realized that they were important entities in an organization, that they were battle leaders responsible for men and animals and their proper usage in combat. These few days of independent command, thrown on their own responsibilities, developed them more than months of barrack soldiering could do.

The sergeants learned from the errors of the corporals; the lieutenants, when their turn came, had learned from the errors of both and, although their problems were much more difficult, involving longer and shorter ranges, diversified and disappearing targets, they worked very smoothly

and very capably. The captains took over their troops finally and utilized the experience already gained to do some fearful execution on the targets. When Davies finally took the squadron as a whole it was a beautifully efficient fighting machine with every part working smoothly.

IT WAS on the last day, the day of the squadron test, that the foreign officers came out, several French and Belgian officers, a chief of staff of the Swiss army —who carried a stop watch on his wrist and timed every movement made—two officers from the Dutch army, and two Spanish generals. Turner accompanied them and General Stithers came out with Timothy and watched rather skeptically while the work went on.

The group of officers, most of them in field gray or khaki but a few of them brilliant in their dress uniforms, stood on an eminence to the right of the entrance of the valley, where they could see both the firing lines and the targets.

Before the squadron problem started, Davies came up, was introduced, and there was much bowing, saluting and clicking of heels as the various foreign officers were greeted.

Copies of the problems were handed to each of the officers.

Then Davies rejoined his waiting squadron and disappeared from view.

From where the group of officers stood the valley looked silent and deserted. There was not a movement nor the stirring of a blade of grass to show that this valley was different from all other portions of terrain nearby.

Meanwhile, far down the road leading to the place, there was a small cloud of dust. Through their field glasses the officers could see that it was a lone man riding forward toward them. Behind him and to the right and left they could see two other men. As the mounted men advanced, a compact, small squad of horsemen could be seen still farther in the rear. The approaching horsemen came forward at the trot.

As they entered the valley the man in the lead scanned the place thoroughly, then kept on moving forward. His two aides swept up the hills on either side. As they had advanced about a third of the way up the stream, suddenly a pistol shot cracked on the air.

The observing officers saw the three troopers suddenly halt, then saw them turn and gallop back. Searching the valley with their glasses, the keenly interested foreigners finally made out the outline of some drab colored silhouettes, partially concealed behind some bushes, at about five hundred yards from the entrance of the valley.

Gazing back in the direction taken by the three men in their precipitate flight, they saw the squad of horsemen in rear coming up at a gallop.

The man leading them suddenly raised his hand. The horses were pulled to their haunches. The Swiss chief of staff set his stop watch. It seemed but a second that the men were on the ground, crouching low and stealing forward. Then they disappeared.

All was silent for a space. Suddenly, from a clump of bushes near the valley entrance, the watchers heard a rapid burst of fire, the angry chattering of an automatic rifle. Dust clouds spurted high around the target.

There was another pistol shot and another group of silhouettes sprang in view on the opposite side of the valley. Far back on the road there were other clouds of dust which resolved themselves into compact clumps of horsemen.

Each of these clumps came to a halt, men shot to the ground, the horses were led away into disappearance at the gallop, and the men disappeared. But in a few seconds another automatic rifle set up its chattering note, to be joined by a third and a fourth.

Other targets appeared on the hillside and in the floor of the valley. Still no soldiers could be seen, nothing could be described of the attacking force. The fire of the attackers augmented steadily until it became a roar of rifle fire and bullets

were whining and kicking up spurting columns of dust above and below the targets and on all sides. The noise rose in a steadily mounting crescendo. Long lines of silhouettes rose from the very earth as if by magic, until the valley seemed filled with silent drab figures around which a rain of bullets whined and sang.

When the fire seemed at the height of its intensity, suddenly a new rattle and smash of automatic rifles broke out from the opposite side of the valley. An outflanking force had moved into position and was directing a heavy cross fire on the targets.

Suddenly the clamor was pierced by the high shrill notes of a trumpet. The firing ceased on the second. All was silent. Then the visiting officers rubbed their eyes with astonishment, for from behind clumps of grass, ridges of earth and logs there rose up the soldiers who had been doing the shooting.

The men remained in place. From somewhere came Davies, on foot. Approaching the group of observers, he invited them to see the targets and the dispositions.

There were many exclamations of astonishment as the targets were examined. The noise had not been mere noise; a terrific percentage of hits had been made. Questions were asked as to the number of rounds expended which Davies answered instantly. The hits were checked up. The officers looked at one another, marveling.

General Stithers, who followed the group from place to place, turned to the Swiss chief of staff.

"It's not so marvelous, considering that they know where every target is in advance," he sneered.

"I beg your pardon, General," Turner spoke up. "Major Davies asked me to set up new targets. I had entirely new targets at entirely new ranges set up this morning."

Stithers answered nothing to this, only twisted his small mustache and looked skeptical.

FROM the targets the officers went toward the men and looked over their dispositions for concealment and their arrangements for ammunition supply. Most of them being cavalry officers, they went back to the led horses, studied their placing and concealment and the measures taken for guarding them.

"Marvelous!" they exclaimed when they had seen everything, and they pressed around Davies, asking him what were his methods of training, how long he had been training his men and whether they were not all old and experienced soldiers.

"Most of them are men of less than a year's service," he replied. "None of them had fired an automatic rifle a month ago." Some of the foreign officers went so far as to raise their eyebrows in polite disbelief.

General Stithers cut short the chorus of praise by curtly inviting some of the foreign observers to accompany him in his car back to Coblenz.

"Sorry to have to hurry you, gentlemen," he told them, "but I'm due in at Coblenz for an inspection of the transportation of my brigade."

Davies remembered having heard that all the trucks and wagons had been ordered into Coblenz from the infantry and artillery units and visualized the long line of them waiting in growling impatience for an inspection that had forced them to travel into Coblenz from their respective camps only to turn around and travel back again after being looked over by a group of staff officers.

The cars containing the general and the foreign observers had scarcely passed out of sight down the road when Davies was called to the telephone. Hargreaves' voice fell on his ears. He was calling from headquarters at Coblenz.

"Hello! Hello! Is that you Davies?" The voice came dimly over the field telephone line. "This is Hargreaves. Is General Stithers there? No? Is there any way you can reach him? No? Oh, hell! What's the trouble? Trouble

enough. I can't get hold of any one. The commanding general has been gone for two days; all of Stithers' brigade is scattered from hell to breakfast and things look pretty funny around here. Yes. It looks like Communists are trying to stage a demonstration. The streets across the river are full of men. No, haven't any one except a few military police. No, I don't dare break up the inspection of the transportation. All the trucks are lined up on the polo field back of Coblenz on the hill waiting for Stithers' inspection. Sure; they ought to be sent out to the range of the infantry. It'll take twenty minutes to get word to them, and it will take another hour before they can get down and back from the infantry camp with reinforcements . . ."

The message suddenly ended. Davies listened. The telephone had gone dead in a second. There was none of that cheerful hum and crackle of a live telephone line. Evidently the wire had been cut. In that case there must be some of the Communist mob between there and Coblenz. Davies did not waste a second in reflection. Hurrying outside, he blew a long blast on his whistle and shouted his orders in the ensuing stillness.

There was a hurried adjusting of girths, a swift leaping into saddles. Scarcely were the troops in formation when Davies ordered—

"Forward—march!"

THE TWO cars containing General Stithers and his guests, the foreign observers, were speeding toward Coblenz. On either side of Stithers in the rear seat of the big military limousine were seated the French military observer and the Belgian attaché.

"Very wonderful exhibition your cavalry staged today," remarked the French lieutenant-colonel. The Belgian officer nodded from the other side.

"Marvelous," he said.

"Very pretty, but more or less a waste of time," replied Stithers disdainfully. "The day of cavalry is over and done with. Infantry in motor trucks can outmarch cavalry."

"But, my dear General, there is much territory left on the earth's surface where motor trucks can not operate," objected the French lieutenant-colonel. "Our North African possessions, for example."

"And our Congo regions, not to mention most of Asia and Africa and South America and Russia and the backward European countries," added the Belgian.

"I disagree with you entirely," Stithers replied flatly. "Cavalry is as out of date as the bow and arrow."

The two foreigners raised the eyebrows slightly, but did not pursue the subject. Very tactfully the French officer began to speak on some other subject.

The smoothly running car ate up the few kilometers and it was not long before they were approaching Coblenz, the shadowy bulk of Ehrenbreitstein high above them on their left as they entered the town along the river road.

It was not until they were actually in sight of the bridge itself that the general noticed the large number of German civilians crowding the streets. The car had to slow down to get through the mob. It seemed an orderly crowd for the most part and he paid little attention to it, aside from wondering how so many people happened to be out on this particular day. It was not until the car swung toward the bridge entrance that he noticed the entire absence of the blue coats and pink collars of the German police.

And then the officers sitting in the car grew silent and looked at one another startled.

For some leader of the crowd, haranguing his followers from a large box near the entrance to the bridge, suddenly turned and pointed at the military cars. The mob turned toward the officers. Fists were raised, a low growl went up from the throats of the agitators. Men started to advance on the officers, their gestures menacing and purposeful.

It was due to the quick thinking of the chauffeur of the leading car that matters did not come to a head then and there.

The chauffeur, sensing that all was not well, suddenly shot his car forward. Men standing in the way leaped to one side. The second car followed at equal speed. In a second both of the military autos were speeding across the bridge safe from molestation.

Stithers was fuming angrily.

"I'll teach them a lesson," he growled and leaned forward impatiently while the cars speeded toward headquarters.

Hurrying up the steps of the headquarters building, followed by the foreign officers, he noticed an air of excitement about the entrance of the place. A general staff major was marshaling a group of seven or eight men, some of them field clerks, most of them orderlies and messengers, inside the main entrance.

"What's this? What's this?" Stithers' voice was choleric as he addressed the major.

"Why, General, there are no troops in Coblenz and we're afraid the Communists are staging a demonstration." The major's voice was excited; without bothering further he turned to his men and inspected their arms.

Stithers' face grew slightly pale. For the first time he realized the true situation. Taking the steps two at a time, he hurried to the office, followed at a more sober gait by the colorful group of foreign officers.

Hargreaves, looking pale and worried, met him inside the door and told him what was going on without mincing any words.

"But have you telephoned to the infantry regiments?"

"Yes, sir," Hargreaves nodded. "They can't get in here under four hours marching."

"Marching, hell! Where are the trucks?"

"They are up on the review grounds waiting for your inspection, sir."

"But, my God, why didn't you send them down after the infantry?" The general's voice was almost hysterical in his excitement.

"I had no authority to cancel your orders for an inspection, sir."

The general growled something under his breath and hurried to the telephone. Turning, the instrument in his hand, he addressed Hargreaves again.

"Get an orderly up to the review grounds immediately, telling the truck drivers to rejoin their commands at once!"

"Very well, sir."

Hargreaves pressed a button and gave his instructions. The general was excitedly calling through the telephone. Hargreaves greeted the foreign officers who had followed their host and waved them to seats.

Turning to the window, Hargreaves swore under his breath.

"I'm afraid they're going to attempt to blow up the bridge, General," he said, and pointed out to the river where a group of men on the opposite bank were approaching the bridge head carrying burdens of some sort.

They were wildly acclaimed by the heavy crowd on the opposite shore. There ensued a lot of milling about and an ill organized effort among the men.

General Stithers was biting his nails as he turned from the telephone.

"Haven't we got enough men around here to break that up?" he cried.

"I've sent out orderlies scouting up every available man, the sentries on post, even the prisoners in the guardhouses," replied Hargreaves. "A few of them are beginning to drift in now, but very slowly. I doubt if there are enough to attack that crowd yet."

He called an orderly and asked some question. The man disappeared, returning shortly, reporting to Hargreaves.

"They have only scared up about sixteen men. It seems the most of the men are up at Ehrenbreitstein across the river. The chaplain was giving some sort of a movie show there this afternoon."

"Telephone them at Ehrenbreitstein."

"The wires are cut, sir."

Hargreaves glanced at his watch.

"The trucks should be about starting from there now," he said. "It will take them about half an hour to get down that hill from the polo field and to reach their commands. We can't expect any help from the infantry under an hour yet, including the time it will take them to load and return."

"An hour!" The general's face was white. He turned toward the window again. Then, his voice subdued, as though he were thinking aloud, "How about the cavalry?" he asked.

Hargreaves shook his head.

"I tried to call you out at the cavalry camp. While I was talking the wires were cut."

"But it shouldn't have taken more than three words to order them in here." Stithers was angry.

But Hargreaves knew his man. And Hargreaves had been well schooled after the Prussian plan, which keeps subordinates from moving without orders.

Stithers frowned and turned toward the window again. What he saw there made him stiffen to attention.

"They are laying a charge on that bridge!" he cried. "Look! There go the men carrying the electric batteries. Now they are slowly moving off the bridge. There are still about twenty or thirty men there. They can't blow it up until those men are off. If we only had a few men!"

THE FOREIGN officers were seized with the excitement in the air. They crowded around the other window, pointing and gesticulating and talking in a babble of French and English.

"Now the last of the men are leaving the bridge. They're getting ready. Two men are still working with the charges. Now they turn and start for the shore. It's too late!" The general's shoulders sagged.

Suddenly there was a shout from the French lieutenant-colonel.

"*Voilà!*" he cried. "The cavalry!"

A glad shout broke out from the officers at the windows and they stared out, entranced at the spectacle on the farther bank.

For suddenly, out of a side street, had debouched ten mounted men at a gallop, their sabers drawn. They bore down on the crowd swiftly. From the main road there thundered the head of the cavalry squadron, Davies in the lead, the squadron standard whipping the breeze behind him, the men bent low on their horses' manes, their sabers in their hands. From still another direction there swept forward a platoon of dismounted cavalry, who threw themselves down and covered the mob with a row of business-like automatic rifles.

The crowd about the bridge head broke and ran, pell-mell. The sight of all those horsemen, of that gleaming steel and the muzzles of those stern, rapid fire guns, was too much for them. So swiftly did the cavalry operate that in a few seconds the streets were cleared without a single rioter hurt, except probably in self-esteem, the cavalry soldiers having spanked them liberally with the flat of the sabers.

Davies posted guards at the bridge head; then leaving his squadron standing to horse, he trotted across the bridge, followed by his orderly. As if by magic, all the excitement and the strain of the last few minutes was dissipated. The officers at the window watched the tall young cavalry officer trot toward the headquarters.

Suddenly there was a commotion behind them.

"Gentlemen, the commanding general!" Hargreaves' voice rang out and they all turned to find him bowing to the tall, gray haired commander of the American forces in Germany.

There was thunder on the commanding general's brow. He strode up to General Stithers.

"How does it happen, Stithers, that you left Coblenz unprotected with troops in my short absence?" he asked, and his voice was like a steel file.

The foreign officers, sensing that something was about to happen in the nature

of a domestic scene, tactfully and quietly withdrew out of earshot.

Stithers stammered like some schoolboy caught out of bounds, his words almost unintelligible.

"What measures have you taken to remedy this disgraceful condition of affairs?" The commanding general's voice lashed like a whip.

Stithers did not answer, pointing out of the window and showing the cavalry occupying the bridge head.

The commanding general turned to Hargreaves.

"What has been done?" he asked.

Hargreaves explained in detail.

"And," he concluded, "if it had not been for the quick arrival with the cavalry things would have gone very badly."

"H'm, Davies, good officer," grunted the commanding general. "Where is he? Send him to me," he ordered.

"He's coming up the stairs now, sir," returned Hargreaves.

It was Davies' luck that he should have stepped into the room at that moment to make his report to Hargreaves. Seeing the commanding general and all the foreign officers closeted there, he hesitated a second.

"Very fine work, Davies. Splendid work!" The voice of the commanding general fell on his ears. "You're not only to be complimented on your initiative in bringing your squadron in without orders, but I saw before I left that the monthly report showed the cavalry as having the highest disciplinary standing in the entire command."

Davies looked startled.

"Is that so, sir?" he asked. Hargreaves handed him a sheet of typewritten paper.

Davies' face flushed with pleasure as he read it.

"General, it was no easy job," he stated very respectfully but very firmly. "It was uphill work, done in spite of all the disadvantages that I enumerated in my letter to you, sir."

That letter containing his carefully thought out recommendations, the letter which had been so signally disregarded by the commanding general, was a sore point with Davies and he meant, for the sake of his men, to take advantage of this opportunity to bring up the matter again.

"What letter?" asked the commanding general, plainly puzzled.

"Why, the letter—er—the one I wrote to you, sir, making the recommendations about the squadron. I sent it through brigade headquarters, General Stithers' office."

"Do you know anything about that, Stithers?" The commanding general looked at him searchingly.

"Why—yes, there was some sort of a letter. I felt that it was superfluous—"

"Send for that letter immediately!"

The commanding general's voice was caustic. Stithers sent out for the document in question, giving an order over the wire. The commanding general spoke in a low tone to Hargreaves, finally turning toward the door, where an orderly stood, carrying an envelope. It was the copy of Davies' letter, written a month previously.

The commanding general took it and, putting on his glasses, scanned it swiftly.

"This is addressed to me through your headquarters, Stithers," he said. "Why was it not delivered?" He looked angry.

"It must have been forgotten through the neglect of Major Timothy, my brigade adjutant," replied Stithers glibly, passing the buck without a qualm.

The commanding general turned again to a perusal of the letter, a frown gathering slowly on his brow. The longer he read the more he frowned.

At last he raised his head. Striking the paper with one hand, he turned to Davies.

"This is nothing but plain common sense," he said. "All this should have been attended to long ago. I am surprised that a unit under my command should have been so handicapped. I am not only surprised, but I am incensed."

He turned toward Stithers. If ever a man looked hot and uncomfortable and guilty, it was General Stithers at that moment.

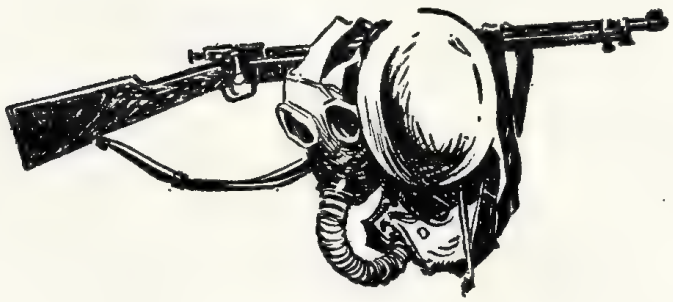
The commanding general leaned toward him and spoke in a low voice.

"It appears from this and from today's happening that your usefulness to my command has been lessened to the vanishing point," he said. "I will forward a cablegram today to the War Department asking that you be relieved from duty with the American forces in Germany and ordered to the United States."

An hour later the infantry came in in motor trucks, wondering what all the excitement was about. The town was quiet and peaceful. The crowds of strange men who had been frequenting it for the last few days had dissipated into thin air.

The abortive attempt of the angry Communists had failed signally, scotched at its inception, killed so quickly that those in Coblenz scarce knew of the momentary flurry it had caused.

But down at the cavalry barracks they knew it. There was a singing contentment in the hearts of the horse soldiers. The shadow of Ehrenbreitstein had lifted itself from the cavalry squadron at Coblenz.



The Malediction

By RAFAEL SABATINI

The author of "Captain Blood" and "The Sea Hawk" returns to our pages with a gripping tale of Feudal Germany

I STOOD erect and defiant, the point of my sword—to which the rash fool's blood still clung—resting upon my boot, and with cold contempt in my glance, I let my eyes wander over the score of idle dogs that encircled me—dogs that barked, yet dared not bite.

Two of them had raised my vanquished and unconscious opponent from the ground and were endeavoring to stanch the blood which spurted freely from the wound I had given him. The others stood around us in a circle, growling and snarling like the curs they were, but taking care to keep beyond my reach.

"It is a nasty wound, *Mein Herr*," said one of those who tended the fallen man.

"The quarrel was of his own seeking," I exclaimed angrily, "and he received his wound in fair fight. If there be one here who says that it is not so, to him I'll answer that he lies, and prove it upon his body if he dare to come forth and play the man."

Their snarling was arrested by the fierceness of my tone and gesture, and albeit their looks were black and sullen enough, their tongues were silent.

I vented my contempt in a harsh laugh of derision.

"So, my masters," I said, sheathing my sword and moving toward a point where the rabble was thinnest, "since none disputes my word, I pray you let me hence."

A way was opened at my approach. Not for me—as I had thought at first—but for another.

A tall, spare man, in the habit of a Capuchin monk, and with the cowl drawn over his head, elbowed his way through to where I stood.

His deep set eyes met mine and for a moment he held my gaze with a look of mingled sorrow and anger.

"So! You have been at your foul work again, Master Von Huldenstein," he said in even, solemn tones that brought the blood to my face.

"You presume upon the safety of your sackcloth," I answered hotly.

"And you, you presume upon the death of the Duke of Retzbach," he retorted with a show of righteous indignation. "When the duke lived the edict was enforced, and men of your kidney were appalled from the ways of murder by the grim shadow of the Schwarzenbaum gibbet. But take heed, sir," he continued, raising his voice. "You shall not pursue

your accursed trade with impunity. I will appeal to the king if need be, and you shall learn that there is still justice and retribution in Schwerlinggen."

White with passion, I stepped up to him, but he brushed me aside with a gesture almost of scorn, and my tongue—usually so nimble—clove to my teeth.

He bent over the unconscious man whilst I looked on, quivering with rage and vainly racking my brain for a fitting answer.

Presently he turned to me again with flashing eyes.

"This man may die, sir," he cried. "Do you hear me? He may die!"

"Then do your shaveling's trade and shrive him," I answered with callous cynicism.

Wonder and indignation seemed to choke his utterance for a moment. Then:

"Oh, God will punish you, you son of Cain," he explained. "Your own murderous sword shall work your undoing, and

if ever in your wasted life there should open out a way for better things—" he raised his right hand aloft, and his gaunt frame seemed to dilate and grow before my fascinated eyes—"may your accursed sword prove an insuperable barrier. In such an hour, if ever it should come to you, may God's curse strike you, and may His vengeance lay you low!"

A shudder ran through the crowd, as much at the words as at the frightful tone in which they were delivered, and many crossed themselves as if that monk had been the devil.

"Silence, Priest," I muttered, stepping close up to him, with my eyes on his. "Do not drive me to do that which I might regret hereafter."

"Hence, hence!" he retorted boldly enough. "There is more already on your soul than—"

He stopped abruptly. Almost unconsciously I had half drawn my dagger and his eyes caught the glitter of steel. The color left his cheeks and he fell back, mumbling some Latin fragments.

I laughed at his sudden fears and, pushing back my poniard, I turned to depart. The crowd made a way for me in silence, and thus I passed out of his presence. I retraced my way to the city, which half an hour earlier I had left in the company of him who now lay between life and death, tended by a vulgar rabble and a Capuchin monk.

The sun was setting as I passed beneath the arch of the Heinrichsthor, and little did I dream of all that would come to pass before it rose again, or of how the dawn would find me.

I stalked moodily along toward the inn of the Sword and Crown where, methought, I was likely to find an evening's entertainment.

In my heart I carried many an evil thought against the priest who had dared to beard me in public and launch upon my head his puerile malediction, but scarcely one for the poor wretch I had transfixed, and who—for aught I knew or cared—might die before morning.

From the scene of my encounter to the Sword and Crown inn I had come direct, and at a fair pace, yet the news of what had taken place was there before me. Even as I set my foot upon the lintel, old Armstadt came hurrying forward, his wonted suave and obsequious manner laid aside and replaced by a rude and offensive bearing that was new to me.

"Not into my house, Master Von Huldenstein," he cried harshly, barring my way with his burly frame. "You shall find no fresh victims beneath my roof."

This was plain speaking—and from a scullion to whose house I had brought endless custom! *Herr Gott!* Had I lived to be refused admittance to a tavern and insulted by a gutter-bred wineseller?

"*Sacrament!* You do not mince your words, you knave. Stand aside!" I thundered, advancing a step.

But he did not budge.

"This house is mine," he answered insolently, "and mine it is to guard its reputation. Shall I have it said that the Sword and Crown is a harbor for assassins and deriders of priests? Away with you!"

For a moment I looked about me in doubt, anger bidding me punish the insolent hound as he deserved, prudence telling me to be gone.

Three or four passers-by had already stopped, curious to see the outcome of this unusual altercation. To own myself beaten and withdraw beneath their eyes was hurtful to my pride. And yet, to linger and persist in a desperate endeavor might provoke a scene from which withdrawal would be still more humiliating.

With a dull feeling of baffled rage, I realized that I must go; and so I went with the best show of dignity I could muster, and watching to see if any of the onlookers dared to comment upon my going. By my soul, if one of them had so much as smiled I would have picked a quarrel with him. But, knowing me, they were wise, and let me go in peace.

Clearly I realized as I quitted the threshold of the Sword and Crown, how the wineshop was from that hour sym-

bolical to me of the attitude of all Schwelingen. The town was closed to me. Go where I might, the same reception would await me. To remain in the capital of Sachsenberg I must starve, and starving is an unpleasant occupation.

I realized to the full how much the Capuchin's malediction was accountable for this, and in my heart I repaid that meddling monk with curse for curse.

A pretty situation, truly! And yet not unexpected. Long ago I had foreseen that such would be the end of the vile life I had led, ever since my father had thrust me from his house in just and righteous anger.

AYE, I had seen it coming. Step by step I had come down the steep incline of knavery and dishonor, clearly beholding that which lay below, yet never striving by a single effort to stay my infamous descent. Possibly the devil had courted a greater blackguard; probably he had not.

Was there any degradation left through the mire of which I might still drag the proud old name of Huldenstein and my besmirched escutcheon? Methought not. I was like a man who had sunk into a morass—too deep ever to extricate himself, too firmly gripped to be able to push on, and for whom there is no choice but to await the end in the foul spot he has floundered upon.

But if I must wait, I would not wait in Schwelingen where I was known, where every glance bestowed upon me would henceforth be an insult. I must go at once! Go *where?*

This was indeed an unanswerable question.

Then a sudden longing seized me. A longing to behold again the castle of my father in the province of Hattau, the home that had once been mine and that belonged to all who bore my name, saving myself—the outcast. I grew suddenly eager to see those from whom I had been separated twelve years ago.

There was my old father. Who could tell? Perchance old age had softened his heart and the approach of death would cast a forgiving mood upon him. There were my sisters; Esther, the eldest—she would be gray by now—and little Stephanie, who cried the night I left the castle. Then there was Fritz. Would he still remember the big brother who had been the first to teach him to sit a horse and hold a sword? I shook my head in doubt. Twelve years had slipped away since then, and Fritz was a boy of ten in those far-off days. He would be a grown man ere now!

As I brooded over all these things the resolve grew strong within me. I would go. I would set out at once. Then suddenly I came to a standstill and a groan escaped me.

How was I to go? I had no horse. I had sold my last one a fortnight before; I had no money; I might almost say that I had no raiment. The very doublet on my back was threadbare and worn to its extremity; my breeches were in no better plight and my boots were such as any groom might blush to own.

And yet go I must and, by the mass, go I *would*—aye even if— Horror stricken, I checked the ugly thought. Awhile ago I thought there was no quality of dishonor that I had not tasted. I was mistaken; there was still one. I might still become a thief and demand money at the sword point. But I could not do it! I was still something of a Huldenstein!

Then I laughed—or was it through my lips, perchance, that the very devil mocked my better self? I know not. Suffice it that I derided my own scruples. I had grown overnice in my conscience of a sudden, that I shrank from wresting an overloaded purse from some rich fool who would not miss it. I had done deeds as foul if in a different way. Why should I stop at this? To a man whose honor was clean, it would be indeed impossible; but to me—bah! 'Twas the only course, and it would lead me—home.

I had wandered aimlessly through the streets during my ill starred musings, and meanwhile night had fallen and it had grown late. The air I clearly recol-

lect was sharp and frosty, although we were in April.

I came to a halt before the Church of St. Oswald and stood for a moment with bent head, whilst the Tempter wrestled with my Guardian Angel. For the nonce the Spirit of Evil was overcome, and I turned at length and wended my way toward the dismal house in the Mondstrasse, wherein I occupied a room on the ground floor. My way lay through the northern quarter of the town, in which no lamps were hung until Wallenheim became minister in 1645—two years later than the events I now set down. There was a fair moon, however, and the sky being clear, the light was tolerably good. Would that it had been otherwise!

I turned the corner of the Mondstrasse with a brisk step and was already within fifty paces of my own door, when my attention was drawn to a tall cavalier approaching from the opposite end of the narrow street. His cloak fluttered behind him in the breeze and the silver lace on his doublet glinted in the moonlight. That it was that, coupled with his stately bearing, made me suppose him a bird worth plucking and—again fostering the vile intention which awhile ago I had stifled—drove me back into the shadow of a doorway.

I glanced up and down the street. Not another being was in sight. Absolute silence reigned, saving only the ring of his spurred heel on the uneven pavement. Of a truth the devil was in the business to deliver him thus into my hands.

I felt the hot blood surging to my head, driven there by shame for myself and the vile act which circumstances seemed impelling me to perform. The air was full of mocking sounds; even the faint rustling of the wind seemed to hum the word "thief" about my ears.

I loosened my sword in its scabbard and stood waiting. How slowly he came. I put my hand to my brow and withdrew it moist with perspiration—the cold perspiration of horror. Pshaw! I was a fool, a sickly coward! Life is a game and the dice had fallen against me.

He was abreast of me, walking with bent head and humming softly as he went.

DEAF to the last appealing cry of honor and conscience, I sprang out from the shadow and, drawing my sword, I set the point against his breast and barred his way.

He looked up, throwing back his head like a horse that has been suddenly reined in, and showed me a thin, aquiline countenance and pointed beard.

His lips parted, but before he could speak—

"If you utter a cry, as God lives, I'll drive this home!" I said fiercely.

He set his arms akimbo and, with his head slightly on one side, he eyed me with cool disdain.

"You are a bold knave," he murmured in tones that were light with easy banter, "but you are presumptuous. Holy Virgin, do I look like a woman, that you fear I shall cry for help at the sight of a single scarecrow?"

"Bravely and most wisely spoken, O fool!" I answered, stung not a little by his attitude and words. "Maintain that reasonable frame of mind and our business will soon be settled."

He smiled serenely, the condescending, tolerant smile that a great lord might bestow upon a horse boy.

"You speak of business. May I inquire its nature?"

"Your purse and jewels. Quick!"

"If that be all," he said composedly, drawing a couple of rings from his fingers, "we need waste no time."

He held out the trinkets, and I put forth my hand to receive them, keeping my eyes on his the while. One of the rings dropped into my palm, the other brushed against the edge of my hand and fell to the ground. Instinctively I attempted to follow it with my eyes. That was my undoing. Quick as lightning, he availed himself of my momentary inattention and, knocking up my sword, he sprang back with a laugh.

Before I quite realized what had taken place, and the trick that had been played upon me, he had whipped out his rapier and thrown himself into a defensive attitude.

"Now, my master," he jeered, "I am in a better position to discuss with you the question of right to my purse—if, indeed," he added with fine scorn, "you be still minded to pursue the argument."

I was loath to do it, but there was no help. Courage, or rather the contempt of death, which only those who own a worthless life can know, was the last semblance of a virtue left me. To be held a coward, even in the estimation of one who knew me not, I would not suffer.

My sword clattered against his, and there we stood, engaged, with every nerve alert and every muscle ready. Then of a sudden the priest's malediction recurred to me and struck a chill through me. Was that glittering point that danced before me in the moonlight destined to carry out the Capuchin's curse?

I shook the grim thought from me. Indeed, he forced me to it. It would need all my wit and strength if I would keep my life, for if ever Casper Von Huldenstein met his match 'twas then.

Up and down that silent street we went in our fierce combat, with set teeth and heavy breathing. Trick after trick I essayed wherewith to circumvent his guard, and yet for all he had a parry and a counter. Moreover the light was bad and the ground uncertain. But in the end I coaxed him to attempt a lengthy lunge; I swerved aside; he overreached himself, and before he could recover I had run him through from breast to back. He sank down at my feet with a stifled groan and there lay still.

I glanced about me with a feeling that was near akin to dread. There was no one in sight.

Then I knelt down beside him and, scarce knowing what I did, I completed my vile task and stripped him of his jewels and a heavy purse. I arose staggering to my feet and looked again fearfully about me. For a moment it occurred to me to attempt to dress his wound; but I dismissed the notion. I knew the nature of the hurt from the course my sword had taken. Why prolong his agony?

Next a wild panic seized me and I fled madly down the street to my miserable lodging, which was but a dozen paces from the spot where he lay.

The door was locked and I had not the courage to knock, lest whoever came to open should see the figure on the ground. I struck my hand against the window. It proved to be unfastened and opened to my touch. A moment later I stood in my room, shivering with the full consciousness of the foul deed. I flung away the purse as if it burnt me. My God, what had I done? Would I ever dare to go home now and clasp my father's honorable hand in mine—mine that was now soiled with this double crime? How long I stood there thinking over what I had done and sorrowing that it was not I who lay out yonder, I can not tell.

Ah! Shall I ever forget those terrible moments? Shall I ever forget the sudden realization of the long career of sin and debauchery that lay behind me? The career that had culminated in the vile act just committed; how it overcame me and shook me with a strange, unknown terror; a feeling that the monk's malediction had in truth been the malediction of God. No; all this I am certain to remember until my dying day. Nor shall I ever forget how those dreadful fears for a moment passed away to give place to old memories that were as beautiful as they were sad. I lived fleetingly through the years which had preceded my downfall; and it was just these placid, trivial hours, when we neither enjoy deeply nor are deeply pained, that came back to me with such poignant force. For are they not the happiest hours of life, those hours of mere peace and content?

All this swept through my brain in a few moments, and once again the present, with its peril and crime, returned, and, rousing myself with an effort, I crossed

the room and groped for the tinder box. With trembling hands I struck the flint perhaps a dozen times before I succeeded in lighting the taper that stood upon the table. I flung myself down on the nearest chair and, burying my face in my hands, I sat there until a light tap at the door made my heart stand still.

I sprang up to listen. Perchance I had been seen and the guard had been summoned. If it were so—who knew?—perchance the monk would make his appeal to the king and the edict would be enforced. I should die the felon's death at the hangman's hands and then truly would his malediction fall upon me.

Then I laughed at my fears. Pshaw! The law came not with so timid a knock. Again I heard it and, unable to endure the suspense, I seized the taper and went to the door. As I opened it a body fell across the lintel. It was my opponent and at the sight of him I shuddered, beset by a thousand fears.

He must indeed be a man of strong vitality to have dragged himself thus far. Was it mere chance that brought him to my door? It must be so.

Quick, before he could raise his eyes, I had let the taper fall and extinguished it with my foot. Then I knelt beside him and raised his head.

"Thanks, friend," he murmured faintly. "The light from your window guided me hither. I am dying. I was set upon by a robber in the street. He has given me my death wound in exchange for what money I possessed."

"Let me see to it," I answered, dissembling my voice.

"'Tis useless; you will but waste time, and I have not many moments left. Listen, I have something to say."

He paused for a moment, then—

"Do you know in this Schwerlingen a man named Huldenstein—Casper Von Huldenstein?"

"I have heard of him," I answered, with a vague tightening at the heart.

"Then seek him out. Tell him—tell him that he is now the Lord of Huldenstein. Tell him that his father died a week ago and, dying, forgave him all. With his last breath he charged me with this message and I came hither rejoicing that I might convey to one who, I believe, is destitute the news of his altered fortunes. As you see, he will never hear the message from my lips, but promise me that you will deliver it to him tomorrow. Promise me!"

"In God's name, who are you?" I cried.

"I am Fritz Von Huldenstein, his brother," he gasped.

He added something which I did not catch. Then his head fell forward and he lay still in my arms. I dimly recollect how, almost bereft of reason, I relighted the taper and closely scanned the face of my dead brother, seeking to find some traces of the features of the boy I had known and loved. Then I flung away the light and with a wild, mad shriek I fled from the house, leaving the door wide open.

And that is how it came to pass that at sunrise I fell fainting on the threshold of the convent of the Capuchins at Loebli and that today Casper Von Huldenstein is no more.

In his place there is Casper, the lay brother, who in sackcloth, with vigils and scourge, with fasting and prayer, seeks to make some atonement for the past, whilst waiting for the hour of his deliverance from the mental anguish for which there is one only cure.

The Jungle

By T. SAMSON MILLER

SHADOWED channels of water criss-crossing a vast forest of mangrove, ebony, palm and mahogany. More islands added every year, as the flow of the mighty Niger meets the check of the Gulf of Guinea and drops its silt, forming a sand bar, from which tropic growth springs up in the moist heat with the magic rapidity of Jack's fabulous beanstalk. Thus the Niger delta grows.

For months the sun is an open furnace door crawling across a monotonous succession of empty skies. A breathless torpidity grips the jungle. The mangroves droop like painted scenery. Here and there are isolated clusters of huts, in small clearings on a bank; huts of fiber and palm leaf, more simple than the homes of beavers. Black creatures who seem hardly human move around the huts.

Once in a great while one may sight a mass of galvanized iron that seems to have neither part nor parcel with the primitive. It is a trading station, built of galvanized iron to withstand the attacks of white ants and the quick decay that is the fate of all dead matter in the malarial mists.

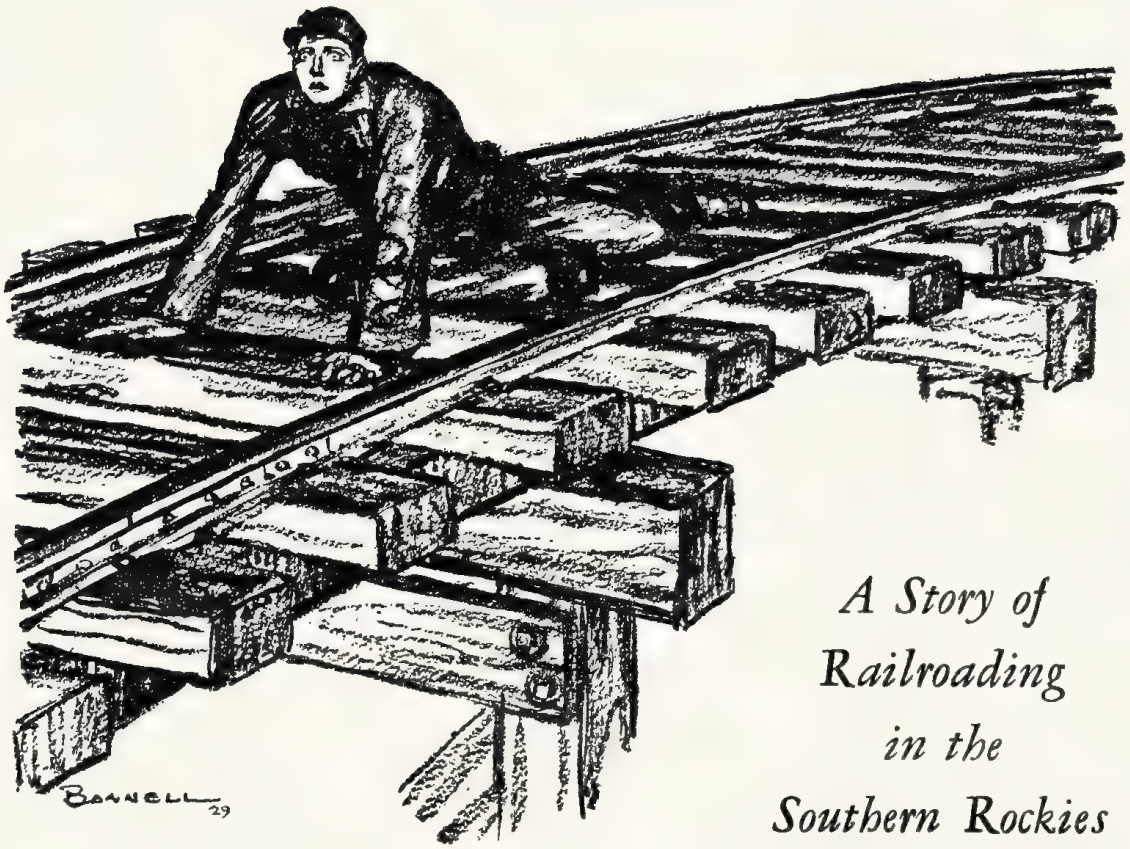
Trees! Millions of trees! Trees and water. Occasionally the shriek of a gray parrot breaks the stillness, or the lord of the jungle lifts his trunk to shatter the silence. A herd of hippos crash through a spidery tangle of mangrove roots. A colony of baboons set up a jabbering. Then again the dreadful silence.

The white trader seeks to escape the monotony of his station by taking gun and entering the jungle. If he is a novice he will neither see nor hear the least sign of animal life. The gloom and stillness of the tomb enwrap him. He goes between the tree trunks, tripping over sucker roots dropped from high branches that make a canopy which the sun never penetrates. There is no undergrowth. His feet sink into leaf mould many feet deep. He sees no animal life. But a twenty-foot python may be stretched along a branch above his head or hanging down with its tail hooked around a sucker root, to come to sudden life if a wild pig or ape happens by.

With lightning rapidity the big snake gets two coils around the victim, constricts the prey to a pulp; then takes it by the nose and literally pulls itself over the body by slow inches, in what is called the engulfing process. The white man strikes from his arm a big, hairy tarantula that has dropped from above. He plunges along, in the moist heat of a Turkish bath, and it is fifty to one that he will find nothing to shoot.

Of a sudden the catalepsy of the day is broken by the reverberating thunder rolls and lightning flashes of the first electric storm of the rainy season. A low, black pall hangs over the jungle. The sun becomes a memory. The mangroves roar under the lashings of tornadoes like an angry sea. Day on day unceasing torrential rains pour down. The rivers grow muddy. The spidery roots of the mangroves disappear under water.

Comes a day when the black pall is rent. To the white trader there is nothing more beautiful than that streak of sky, unless it is the sight of clouds after the wearisome succession of empty skies. The monotonous walls of green burst out with great splotches of vivid color.



A Story of Railroading in the Southern Rockies

TORPEDO

By E. S. DELLINGER

THE Mountain Division of the P & C always has been and always will be as dirty a job of transcontinental railroading as there is in the United States. For forty miles out of Las Lunas, the track threads its way in and out among the red sandstone hills, which, covered with piñon and scrub cedar and juniper, rise tier on tier to the foot of the Tecolotes. For another nine miles it climbs in hairpin turns and on reverse curves to the top of Moreno Pass. From there to the Devil's Elbow, a mile above Lobo, it goes swirling and tumbling down Cañon Diablo. In places the track is carried along on high trestles which makes it appear to be hung on brackets clinging to the cañon wall. Far below it tumble the waters of Great River; high above it tower granite walls which reach up into the blue.

During the last few years electric block signals have changed conditions, but before the day of block signals, before the officials began firing whole crews for trying to set speed records down these mountain grades, running trains on the Mountain was no job for timid souls. When a hog-head ran over a torpedo or flashed around a curve with a red light or a fusee throwing crimson into his face, he simply kicked his brake valve over on the big hole, whistled a couple of shorts and got ready to join the angels.

It took men of fortitude to ride the head end of a red ball freight when Swede Anderson or Red Henderson got to playing crack the whip with it around the Devil's Elbow. But when Old Pat Malone pulled out of Lobo on the straightaway on short time ahead of the Fast Mail, that was when a new man on the Mountain showed his colors.

Not that these men were reckless or careless. They were not. They were speedy only because they knew how fast they could take every curve and hit every rail joint between Lunas and Coronado, and had the nerve to go the limit. Getting trains over the road in the fewest possible minutes was their business. Initiating new men into the service of the P & C was a side line to that business; but in that side line they found the joy of living—especially Pat Malone.

Until he was well past middle age, it was the delight of his wild Irish life to get a student, fresh and green, or a bull slinging boomer off a plains job, for a banana train or a meat run down Cañon Diablo or Cochino Hill on short time—and the shorter the time the better. More than one boastful youngster had groped his way across the reeling cab and begged Old Pat to slow down before he put them in the ditch. Old Pat, because he knew no fear, would laugh at him, taunt him, curse him and order him back to his seat on the other side.

Old school hoggers that they were, these men could overlook weak morals in a buddy, even though they themselves laid off the booze and the women. They could overlook lack of brains—erroneously aver that the railroader did not need any. But lack of nerve? Never! To their way of thinking a railroad man without nerve was no man at all. He was more contemptible than the lowliest worm.

Years ago when the Big Swede's kid—the one who had gone firing at sixteen—got scared going down Cochino Hill on a banana train and begged Old Pat Malone to let him off so he could walk in, Pat swore that if a kid of his ever showed the yellow streak he would take the youngster by the nape of the neck and the seat of the pants and throw him out of the gangway, told the Big Swede and several other folks as much. And Big Swede and the rest agreed it should be done.

Most fellows who stand one dose of fast running never come back for the second. They quit. But Little Swede stayed with the job, was promoted, became a fast hogger like his father, died in a washout down Cañon Diablo, thereby wiping out the stigma of his disgrace. Most of the fellows had forgotten it. Old Pat and the Big Swede still remembered, and as the five young Malones grew old enough to come on the Mountain job, the one man feared, the other hoped, that somehow the score would be evened—that a Malone, too, would die.

One by one Old Pat's boys went railroading. Igghy and Little Pat were firing at eighteen, and Bill and Mike were braking even younger. Chips off the old block, all four of them. Neither the Big Swede nor Red Henderson nor Old Pat himself could ever get a freight hog rolling fast enough to make one of them bat a lash. Old Pat was proud of these four—any father would have been; but he watched anxiously the growth of Jimmie the baby.

Jimmie was different from the other boys. Injured at the age of five when, with his mother, he was riding No. 9 to Coronado the time Billie Moran hit a broken rail on Cochino Curve, he seemed never to have entirely recovered. He was a little runt. Alongside his bigger brothers he looked like a Shetland pony in a stable full of draft horses.

But the worst feature of the matter, to Old Pat's way of thinking, was the boy's timidity and nervousness. He seemed to have an unholy horror of trains and cars and engines. He never got out and hopped freight trains as the rest of the boys had done, nor played about the roundhouse, nor came down to the engine yard begging to be taken up into the cab with his father. He had to be coaxed into a cab, and always got away as soon as possible.

There grew a question in the engineer's mind whether or not to make a railroader out of this boy.

Mrs. Malone's advice was always negative. She wanted one boy for her own—one who would not follow his father, enticed by the lure of the rail. Furthermore, she always worshipped this one because of his affliction. She kept his mop of red hair in ringlets and his pink face clean as a baby's until he was almost ready for high school. Then when they brought home what was left of Little Pat after the Domingo wreck, she begged more than ever that Old Pat give up the idea which had become little less than an obsession with him—the idea of furnishing the P & C with a whole train crew.

As for Jimmie himself, he loved music more than the clatter and clang of the freight train. Hour after hour he poured out his soul through the strings of a violin. At first it was his father's old squeaky fiddle, then a better instrument presented him by his mother. At fifteen he won the Music Federation violin contest, and at eighteen he was making as much money playing in the orchestra at Seivers Dance Hall as his father earned running an engine for the P & C. If the war had not come Jimmie Malone probably would never have gone on the rail.

BUT WHEN the war came, men off the P & C flocked into the Army like sheep into a stock car. Two of the Malone boys enlisted, and Mike would have gone if he had not lost some toes under a car wheel a few weeks before War was declared. Jimmie was too little even to think about the Army. But when Trainmaster Mack walked the Lunas streets, begging fellows to go braking so he could keep his trains moving, Jimmie, patriotic little soul that he was, decided to go into the train service. Mack objected at first. He said Jimmie was not strong enough to do the work; hemmed and hawed about it for an hour. Then, because he was needing men, and because of the record the other boys had made, he put the kid out to work.

Old Pat was happy, but with it all he was a bit uneasy. He knew the Big Swede was still hoping for a chance to see a Malone show the streak, was not sure the kid had guts enough to stand the Big Swede's wild rides down through the Lobo Hill country. But then the Big Swede was running passenger most of the time now. Perhaps the kid might not catch a run with him until he had had time to become thoroughly accustomed to the business. Certainly no other man in freight service could ever make his kid squeal! When, at the end of sixty days, nothing had happened, the old man began to breathe more easily.

Then one night in July Jimmie was called out braking on a deadhead equipment train with the Big Swede for engineer. The train consisted of two empty baggage cars, trailed by fourteen empty Pullmans and the caboose. They were going to a southwestern camp for troops. Leaving Lunas, Jimmie caught the head sleeper, which was more comfortable riding than the engine cab, and made his way into the smoking compartment where rode the dusky porter in charge of the car.

"Howdy, boss," greeted the porter. "Is you all de head shack on dis wagon?"

"Yeah. That's my job."

The porter laid down a banjo he was picking and moved some belongings out of the seat to make a place for Jimmie opposite him.

As soon as Jimmie was seated, he resumed his rendition of "Swing Low". Jimmie watched him, listening critically. That colored boy could surely make a banjo talk. While he played, Jimmie reached a hand into his pocket and drew out a signal torpedo—one of those black metal cases filled with explosive which are placed by flagmen on the right rail to attract the attention of a passing engineer. It is a little affair, the size of a dollar, oval on the top side like the sector of an orange, flat on the under side with two leaden straps by which it could be fastened to the rail. Jimmie played with the torpedo for

miles, wrapping the leaden straps about his finger and unwrapping them until they were completely worn through. Playing with torpedoes was a habit of his, formed almost as soon as he had gone to work on the P & C. In fact, so noticeable had this habit become that the boys now called him Torpedo.

In spite of the fact that the equipment train had been on the upgrade most of the way, they made good time to Moreno, the summit of the pass. Still, though they had left Lunas an hour late on schedule and had made up half of it in seventy miles, they seemed to have done no phenomenally fast running. In fact, Jimmie was vaguely wondering what had suddenly caused the fast hoggers like his father and the Big Swede and Red Henderson to quit the speeding of which he had heard his brothers talk ever since he could remember.

Pulling out of Moreno, he caught the caboose and went forward through the train, turning up the retaining valves to help hold the brakes on the grade. The empty Pullmans were dark. The shades were drawn. Only the dusky porter in charge of each clung ghostlike to his empty shell. The gaunt, dark, unpeopled spaces gave him a feeling of depression, of fear almost. He was glad when he had turned up the last retainer and had come once more to the head sleeper where his friend, the porter, having laid down his banjo, was smoking a cigaret.

All the way down Cañon Diablo he noticed that the cars rocked and heeled far out on the curves. Sometimes he wondered a little if they had left the rails and were turning over. Still, he had ridden No. 7 as fast, or faster, and thought little of it. Just before they took the Devil's Elbow the sleeper gave a lurch which tossed both him and the porter against the wall. The porter straightened up in his seat, threw his cigaret stub into the cuspidor and, with a grin, turned to Jimmie.

"Boss, dey sho does ramble dese jacks down here through dese hills, huh?"

"Yes. Yes—sometimes." Jimmie spoke slowly.

The train rumbled over the last trestle and took the Elbow. The wheels seemed to lift from the rail and settle back. The porter grabbed for the chair arm.

"They don't run 'em like they used to, though," Jimmie concluded, chuckling.

The porter turned loose the chair arm, blinked his big eyes at Jimmie and, with a shake of his woolly head, settled back into his place.

"Well, boy! Ef'n dey ain't wheelin' 'em down dis holler tonight, I'd sho'n hell hate to be ridin' dese cushions when dey was."

JIMMIE laughed shortly. The whistle sounded for Lobo. When they stopped to take water, he turned up the retainers and, telling the porter to leave the front vestibule open, went forward to the engine. The Big Swede was down on the ground oiling around. Jimmie stood watching him squirt oil into holes and screw down the grease plugs.

"Where we goin' for No. 4, Mr. Anderson?" he questioned.

"Everything runnin' all right, sonny?"

The grizzled Swede gave the last grease plug a twist and picked up his torch off the side rod.

"Everything O.K."

The old man pulled out his watch and looked at it.

"Then we're goin' to Cochino, son."

Jimmie checked time with him. Eighteen miles. No. 4 due in Cochino in seventeen minutes.

"We'll play the devil goin' to Cochino."

Jimmie stared at the old man incredulously. On the tank the fireman dropped the lid, waved his torch and yelled—

"Le's go!"

The Big Swede strode toward the gangway, flinging back over his shoulder:

"Sure we're goin' to Cochino. If we don't make Cochino for 4, we're stuck fer 6 and 10, an' them's two soldier trains. It's Cochino or hell in fifteen minutes."

The Big Swede swung into the gang-

way. Jimmie started walking back toward the third car.

"Where you goin', kid?" bawled the engineer before the brakeman had passed the tender.

"Goin' back to this head sleeper where I've been ridin'," yelled Jimmie, striving to make himself heard above the blow of steam and the bubble of boiling water.

"Come back here," yelled the Swede, motioning for Jimmie to return to the cab.

The flagman swung a high sign from the rear end. Steam hissed and sputtered from cylinder cocks. The wheels began to revolve slowly as Jimmie swung up the engine steps and stopped behind the Big Swede in the gangway.

"You're ridin' the engine down here tonight, kid," informed the engineer in a voice of authority. "We're goin' to be on short time down at Cochino. I ain't got no time fer a sissy to walk a half mile to open a switch. You gotta be out on that pilot ready to make a run fer it as soon as I stop. You want to be damned sure to git it, too. I ain't kiddin'. I ain't hankerin' after no brownies for layin' that white collar special out. Not me."

Without a word of dissent Jimmie crossed the cab and sat down in front of the fireman. The exhaust came in short, quick gasps at first, then more and more rapidly until it became a blaring roar as the string of empty Pullmans lined out on the sixteen mile straightaway.

"Ever ride with the Big Swede, kid?" queried the fireman once when he reeled up out of the deck after putting in a fire.

"Nope. My first trip with 'im."

"Well, believe me, boy, you're goin' to git some experience tonight. We're goin' to take a ride."

Take a ride! Yes, Jimmie already knew they were going to take a ride. But then he would not squeal, not if the Swede turned the train over and killed the whole crew. *He* was a Malone. He had heard his father and his brothers laugh about the yellow necks who squealed when they started down these grades on short time, who begged to be let off to walk in. He might get scared, but Swede Anderson would never know it.

Two miles out of Lobo he wondered how fast they were going. But he would not cross the cab to look at the speedometer. Besides, it registered only to seventy-five. When the fireman was down putting in a fire, he slipped his watch out of his pocket and furtively counted poles for one minute. They made a mile and four-tenths while he counted. But the track was straight. The cab was leaping and rocking from side to side until the fireman had to brace himself to stand in the deck. Jimmie could scarcely hold his place on the brakeman's seat. Still the Big Swede was working steam. The side rods were flashes of silver in the moonlight. Black smoke poured out from the short stack, fought its way up against the terrific speed, then trailed low over the backs of the reeling, rocking Pullmans.

Jimmie pulled out a torpedo, wrapped the straps about his fingers, thought of the porter in the head Pullman who had remarked about "rambling", and smiled grimly. The porter was yellow! The Big Swede glanced in at the gage glass, looked at his watch, turned back and gave the throttle another jerk.

Jimmie began recalling tales he had heard men tell of speed and wreck and fire. There was old John Doolan, the crossing watchman. He had lain under an engine in a wreck on this hill and had his right hand cooked in a jet of steam until the flesh came off the bone. Jimmie shuddered. He recalled as distinctly as if it had been yesterday, the wreck on Cochino Curve thirteen years ago. He could hear even now the screams of Billie Moran and his fireman as they burned alive beneath the wreckage.

Telegraph poles were darting by like fence posts. Never had he ridden a train so fast as tonight. The cab leaped up and settled back. The scooping apron snapped about and tossed the fireman against the boiler head. The fireman stuck his scoop into the coal and climbed angrily upon his seat.

"That cussed fool's goin' to turn us

over tonight, kid. He had no business tryin' to make Cochino for 4. Damn' crazy nut."

The fireman's words augmented the fear already creeping into Jimmie's heart. He brought himself to with a bang. No! He, Jimmie Malone, would not be afraid. He could ride an engine as fast as Swede Anderson could run it.

THE FIREMAN slipped off the seat, leaned against the cab frame and scooped coal into the dancing, roaring furnace. The engine struck one of the long swinging curves, slewed over to the right, seemed to ride the wheels of one side and hang on balance. Jimmie clutched at the sill of the cab window, grabbed a hot pipe with his right hand; was still clutching when the fireman returned to his seat. The engine settled back and went skimming down past the green switch lights of Cabeza.

The fireman, standing now, looked at Jimmie, shrugged his shoulders, tossed a cigaret stub into the gangway and clutched the boy by the suspender. Jimmie jumped.

"Hittin' close to ninety, ain't we, kid?" the fireman yelled into his ear.

"Ninety or better." Jimmie's voice was a bit husky.

Ninety miles an hour! That was foolishness. Yet he knew they had to make time on the straightaway if they reached Lobo without laying out Number 4. And nobody on the division dared delay the crack train of the P & C one minute. To delay it would mean certain punishment.

Far behind him he could see the light in the cupola window and the green marker behind it, weaving to and fro, to and fro, disappearing, reappearing. He watched them as they reeled far out and then swung back to hide behind the bulk of swaying, varnished Pullmans which glistened in the moonlight. Ninety miles an hour!

Down the straightaway they reeled. The fireman did not sit now when he came to the window between his short periods of scooping. He stood, hands on sill, watching ahead uneasily, standing as if ready to leap from the window at an instant's warning. Jimmie looked across the cab at the Big Swede. The old engineer sat erect, left hand on the throttle, right closed over the brake valve, utterly oblivious to everything except the track ahead, intent on getting his train into Cochino in the fewest possible seconds, riding as he had ridden under stress every week for thirty years. If he remembered he was initiating Old Pat Malone's kid he did not show it.

Jimmie felt his tension relax, felt a bit of his nervousness leave him.

But suddenly inside the cab there came a crash of splintering glass, a slight explosion, the blow of escaping steam. The cab filled with a dense white cloud. Only a splintered water gage glass! But how could Jimmie, new to the game, know that? Steam poured out from the gangway and the windows. Nothing was visible. To his distorted senses the cab seemed hurtling through the air, seemed turning end over end. He knew he was moving with terrific speed, but he could not tell in what direction. The fear which he had felt moments ago creeping upon him, clutching at his throat, now surged anew. It became a frenzy. He thought they were in the ditch. His determination to hold his head left him and with one wild cry he leaped to his feet and started hurling himself across the cab. The fireman was in the deck, cursing, groping for the shut-off cock on the gage. Jimmie ran into him, chattering with senseless fear, almost knocked him down. He heard air hissing out from the port, scrambled toward the engineer's seat, grabbed the Big Swede by the overall leg and croaked out:

"What's the matter, Swede? What's the matter? Are we goin' in the ditch?"

"Naw, we ain't goin' in the ditch," growled the engineer contemptuously, kicking loose the hold on his overall leg.

He whistled for Cochino—whistled a meeting point. Then:

"Git back over there, you damned little yaller necked sissy! Git yer lantern an'

git out there on that pilot and open that switch. Don't you stop me neither, or I'll git offen this engine an' kick the tail off you."

The fireman had found the cock on the gage glass. The cab was cleared of steam, and with its clearing, Jimmie regained full possession of his faculties. His pallor gave away to the crimson tinge of shame. But it was too late. He, Jimmie Malone, had shown the yellow streak.

LIKE the Little Swede, Jimmie stayed with the job. He endured the taunts and jibes of the men whose nerve had never failed them. He strove mightily to live down his disgrace. The night was never too dark, the wind too wild, nor the snow too deep on the passes for him to go on a call. But what chance had he? It is one of the ironies of life that a man may falter in some little thing, may in an unguarded second fall so deeply in the esteem of his brothers that years of patient perseverance can not enable him to rise. It was not for himself, however, that he cared. Their sneers and smiles meant little to him. After all, what mattered it how Swede Anderson, Shorty Slone and the rest of the gang regarded him? To his delicate nervous system his fright had been legitimate, to have lost his head in a moment of danger was not a serious blunder; but not so to his father.

During the next eighteen months Old Pat Malone's shoulders took on a stoop as of the weight of years. His hair whitened. His face grew haggard and wrinkled. His ready smile disappeared, and his eyes became shifty with a hangdog look. He did not go to the pool hall, now. At Coronado he no longer held a hand in the pinochle game. He shunned his former cronies like a man who had been sentenced to prison. Some folks attributed his change to the fact that Little Pat had died in the Domingo wreck. Others said it was because Bill had gone to France and would never return. But, though he never mentioned the matter, Big Swede Anderson knew better. So did Jimmie Malone and Jimmie Malone's mother. When the influenza came and the old man raved with fever it was not of the dead he spoke, but of Jimmie—Jimmie, the son who had disgraced him. Not once in consciousness was there recrimination or upbraiding; but Jimmie knew and he, because he loved his father, would have died to wipe away the stain which he had put upon the name of Malone.

He hoped for opportunity, prayed for it with all his soul, was still hoping when at last it came.

It was a night in late March, 1919. Snows had been melting for three days in the lower altitudes, sending their waters down in a muddy swirl through cañon and arroyo, and though fogs are unusual in the southern Rockies, white vapor arose this night like steam from a giant caldron and hung in dense cloud about the Lunas Yard. At a block distant street lamps were but dim blurs laboring through the thick veil of fog, and at two blocks no lights were visible.

Jimmie Malone was called to run light to Coronado on second No. 9 with a passenger engine. He went down to the roundhouse about 10:30 to get the engine. Entering the road foreman's office he stood, lantern on his left arm, cap shoved back from his mop of red curls, scanning the engine board. Glancing up from the bottom, he saw that his father, marked up for third No. 9, troops returning from France, would follow him out in thirty minutes. He was whistling softly, but as his eyes traveled up the board he ceased. His right hand went into his pocket and brought out a torpedo. His tanned face turned crimson, his stooped shoulders straightened. He toyed nervously with the torpedo. He was riding again with Big Swede Anderson.

The door opened behind him. The Big Swede, grip in hand, strode into the office.

"Howdy, kid," he greeted. "Goin' out with me tonight?"

"Yes, sir," answered Jimmie, letting his eyes shift.

The old man stood studying the board.

Jimmie glanced furtively up at him, but if the grizzled giant even remembered that night almost two years ago when Jimmie, blubbering with fear, had grabbed him by the leg, he did not show it. When he had checked the board and the bulletin book he strode out of the office, followed by the brakeman.

After he had coupled the engine on his caboose and backed up the main line for orders, Jimmie stood on the ground staring into the gray fog. Old Pat Malone and his fireman came by on their way to the roundhouse, stopped with the usual question—

"What you gittin', Torpedo?"

"Gittin' second Number 9."

"Who's your hogger?"

"Swede Anderson."

The engineer winced. Without another word he moved off through the fog, his fireman trailing him, and Jimmie sighed as he noticed how feeble his father had become.

Presently the Swede and the conductor came out with their orders, climbed to engine and caboose. Jimmie hesitated until both men had disappeared, debating whether to ride in cab or cupola. Ordinarily there would have been no question, but with Swede Anderson . . . The engineer whistled highball. The conductor swung a high sign from the platform. Jimmie turned from the comfort of the caboose and climbed to the deck of the 3772. The Big Swede looked at him inquiringly as he came up the steps, then, with a shrug, turned his eyes away, opened his throttle, squirted sand under drivers; and the passenger mogul leaped away from the yard office.

Jimmie stood in the gangway, staring down at the tubes through which the mechanical stoker was driving coal upward to be spread by steam jets over the white hot surface of the firebox. Then, climbing to the seat in front of the fireman, he sat looking gloomily into the fog. High up on the coal chutes, as they clattered past, torches were flaring, weird figures were moving and voices were calling hoarsely down to hostlers coaling road engines.

The chutes sank into the fog. The yard lights of Lunas, distorted, shapeless blobs of yellow and red and green, grew bright in front, grew dim and faded out behind. By the time they had reached the milepost the 3772 was making forty miles an hour, and a mile farther on was doing close to sixty.

Still, though they could not see a hundred feet beyond their pilot, so implicitly does the experienced railroader come to rely upon his brother, that not a man gave thought to danger. So tonight they stormed along, nosing around sharp curves, plunging through the fogs, threading their way in and out among red sandstone hills, climbing ever toward the foot of the Tecolotes, knowing not and caring less what lay beyond.

TEN MILES from Lunas they climbed above the fog. The full moon, floating now over a white sea of clinging vapor, poured its soft light down upon black clumps of piñon and scrub cedar darting by. Jimmie fumbled incessantly with his torpedoes. Every strap was broken off. A face was haunting him, a stooped figure, moving away into the mists of the Lunas yard, the figure of his father. It haunted him while the fireman hummed snatches of "O, Bury Me Not". It haunted him when he looked across the cab at the erect form of the Big Swede, sitting hand on throttle watching twin miles of shimmering steel, which whined beneath them. It haunted him while they clattered over lonely switches, crashed by dimly lighted stations where hermit operators dropped red order boards to green at their approach, waved and were gone.

At one of these lonely stations the board glared red. Jimmie dropped down to the engine steps, picked up an order and a message. The order read—

SECOND NO. 9, ENGINE 3772, WILL MEET EXTRA 1644 AT MORENO.

The message—

SECOND NO. 9 WILL EXCHANGE ENGINES WITH NO. 4 AT LOBO, ACCOUNT ENGINE 3778 DISABLED.

Scarcely slowing to pick up the orders, the Big Swede bore on into the night.

For more than an hour Jimmie had sat listening to the beat of the exhaust and the blare of the whistle as the Big Swede called the stations and sounded his crossing warning. Before them was the grade leading up to Moreno Pass, that nine mile zig-zag climb up the mountain side. As they struck the heavier grade the fireman slipped off into the gangway, opened his firedoor, shielded his eyes with his scoop and peered into the furnace. Then, returning to his seat, he turned more steam into his stoker engine, adjusted his distributor valve and started another cowboy song.

Jimmie crossed the cab to stand behind the Big Swede, yet for six miles neither spoke. The engineer whistled for the mile post, whistled his meeting point with the extra. He and Jimmie drew gold watches from jumper pockets and checked the time—11:59. They were on the dot.

"Hope that extry's up here," ventured the brakeman.

"Probably will be," boomed the engineer. "Dispatcher won't let them lay us out when we're goin' to relieve Number 4."

They swung around a curve and out of the cut at the top of the pass. A torpedo burst beneath them. The engineer shoved up his throttle, laid a hand on the brake valve. Sixty feet farther on another boomed. Two torpedoes—caution signal. The Swede answered with his whistle. A red fusee flared down by the switch, moved back and forth across the track. With a muttered curse the engineer again sounded his whistle. The fusee described an arc and landed in the ditch where it lay sputtering as the 3772 came to a stop even with the waiting flagman. The fellow climbed into the cab.

"What's the matter, kid?" greeted the engineer.

"Stuck. Down by the Devil's Elbow. Had to double the hill."

The brakeman was wet and shivering.

"Rainin'?" queried the hogger.

"Rainin' like pourin' it out of a boot down that lower cañon. Fog so damned thick you can cut it in chunks. Hoghead can't take a signal from the hind end o' the tender. Rails like soap. Had three big jacks on two thousand tons. Wheels got to slippin'. Went dead an' couldn't budge 'em. Some job railroadin' you birds got here on this lousy pike. Me? I'm goin' to find a railroad."

With a disgusted snort, the shivering brakeman crowded closer to the boiler to dry his wet clothing. Steam whined and moaned in the boiler. Air pumps pounded. Jimmie and the engine crew nodded, snapped awake to look at watches and nodded again. The operator came out on the station platform and gave a "back up" signal. Jimmie caught it and notified the engineer. The big Swede brought the 3772 back to the station platform to receive an order.

"Bet they're runnin' Old Pat Malone around me with his damned soldier train," he growled to Jimmie as the latter went down the engine steps.

But the old man was mistaken. The order was simply a new schedule made necessary by their long wait.

"Where's Old Pat an' his soldier train, Shorty?" the Swede called down to the operator.

"Oh, he's stuck down at the foot of the hill."

"What's the matter with 'im?"

"Nothin'. Only he's got to have the pushers of this extry to go down an' help 'im over the hill."

"Oh," chuckled the Big Swede, looking at Jimmie, "I'll bet Old Pat's cussin' till you could hear him a block."

The operator returned to the office. A headlight came around the curve at the lower switch. The Big Swede began whistling for his flagman. Two low wheeled mountain engines clanked and snorted by, dragging their string of groaning freight cars into the clear. Behind

the caboose, a third one coughed along, cleared the switch and the brakeman turned the switch from red to green. A white light by the switch swung a high-ball. Soon the flagman from second No. 9 came trotting down to the caboose, lifted his lantern and they were gone.

AS THEY entered the Cañon of the Devil the fog once more arose to meet them. Jimmie sat in front of the fireman watching telegraph poles rise from it like ghosts with arms outstretched, take shape, dart by to be swallowed up in the darkness which closed in behind them. Farther down the fog thickened. The headlight struck bravely into it to be shattered and dissipated as if it were the glow of but a single match. At forty miles an hour they dropped down the gorge, checking only for the sharpest curves. The engine swung from side to side. It roared over high trestles and into its roar came the angry growl and thunder of tumbling waters beating their way among granite boulders which strewed the bottom of the gorge.

Jimmie fell to thinking about that other trip down the cañon with Swede Anderson. He shoved his hands deeper into his pockets, feeling for his torpedoes. But the straps were gone from them. He removed the last useless discs and threw them out of the window. He looked across the cab at the Big Swede, sat still for a minute, then crossed the cab and stood beside him.

"Got any guns in the box, Mr. Anderson?" he called. "I've used all mine."

"You mean you've wore 'em all out, you damned little runt," growled the engineer.

Then he lifted himself from the seat box, stuck his head out of the window while Jimmie fumbled and found three good torpedoes.

Jimmie recrossed the cab, deliberately laid his empty hands on the sill of the open window, held them there for three minutes. Then unconsciously he let his right one glide into a pocket, brought out one of the guns and wrapped the straps about his finger, sat playing with it while two miles passed beneath them.

As they approached the Devil's Elbow the engineer called across to the fireman:

"Hey, Gus! Come here an' watch 'em a minute while I'm gittin' me a drink!"

The fireman crossed to the right side of the cab and took the throttle. The Swede came to the left behind Jimmie, picked up the water jug from the fireman's seat and started drinking. Jimmie was sitting with his head thrust out of the window watching along the track. Suddenly, while he looked, while the Big Swede stood drinking. he saw the short length of dimly lighted track disappear from view. A wall seemed thrust across it—a broken wall. For a split second he hesitated. But as the meaning of the amorphous wall into which they were plunging dawned upon him, he leaped to his feet, screaming one word—

"*Landslide!*"

Even as he yelled the fireman shot the air into emergency. But it was too late. The engine struck nose down into the moving mountain side. Jimmie kicked frantically at the drop seat, scrambled for the cab window. The Big Swede dropped the jug to the floor with a crash, started instinctively for his throttle which the fireman had already closed. But he never reached it. The jar of the impact hurled him against the boiler, whence he rebounded toward the gangway in a half-conscious struggle for a footing.

Jimmie reached the open cab window and grasped the sill. It seemed an eternity he struggled for freedom. The tender swung sidewise, crushing into the cab. One wild cry—a death cry—came from the fireman. The blow of steam from broken pipes and crushed cylinders drowned the cry, and mingled with it was the crash of impact, the rattle of shattering glass, the rumble of rocks sliding down to be swept away in the racing waters of Great River.

The engine was rising on its nose like a roped steer, was careening toward the precipice. Jimmie, with a mighty effort,

hurled himself from it to fall unconscious in the ditch, where rocks tumbled about him. The engine teetered for a moment on the brink, then took the final plunge into the seething waters of Great River a hundred feet below, carrying the tender with it. For an instant the caboose hung above the precipice crosswise of the track. Then it too took the fatal plunge, carrying with it the conductor and the hind brakeman. The blow and bubble of tons of hot steel plunged into freezing water arose for a brief time, then ceased; and the only sound in Cañon Diablo was the growling thunder of the angry waters as they cut away the slide and went plunging triumphantly around the Devil's Elbow.

WHEN Jimmie came slowly back to consciousness, rocks and earth were still rolling down about him. His head ached dully. He rubbed a hand across it. The hand moved over sticky substance, painful to the touch. It came away wet. He lifted himself to his elbow, staring dully through the fog. Just out of reach was the dim bulk of what appeared to be a human form lying between the rails. But it was so dark that he could not be sure. It might be a mound of earth. Jimmie started to crawl toward it, dropped back moaning. Every movement caused him intense pain.

Then he tried to call for help. His mouth would not close. He uttered only an unnatural, throaty gurgle. The wind, whipping mists down the cañon, sobbed mournfully among the pine and spruce trees clinging to a ledge of rocks. Audible when the roar of the river subsided for a moment, it wailed down the rocky gorge. Its cooling breath fanned his numbed face, revived him only to pain.

He passed a hand over his face, about his lower jaw where the pain was most severe. It felt out of shape. His mouth sagged crazily like an empty sack. He dropped back and lay still, moaning with pain.

After a long time he lifted himself once more and peered crazily from his one open eye at the huddled form half buried in the slide of rocks. The Big Swede! He tried to scramble to his feet, and dropped back with a cry. His right leg crumpled beneath him—broken. A twinge of pain shot up his thigh and he keeled over once more.

Soon the cold air revived him. He rolled over, started dragging behind him his broken leg to the figure lying between the rails. It was the Big Swede. He ran a hand over the face. The great body shivered. The Big Swede moaned and murmured something. It was only a whisper, a mumbled whisper. Jimmie rubbed the face, fell over the body and caught the murmur. It was barely audible in the roar of the river, but the one word he caught went through him like a thousand volts. It was the broken word of command—

"Flag!"

He started up. Somewhere back in the night mists, third No. 9 was thundering down upon them. Third No. 9, and his father was on the engine. His father would be wheeling sixteen coaches, making up time—sixteen coaches of soldiers returning from the war. How far back they were he had no way to determine. It seemed hours since they had plowed into the landslide. He yanked out his watch, but he could not see the hands. He tried once more to struggle to his feet, but he could not rise. His leg was broken. He was blind in his left eye. His lower jaw sagged crazily. He tried to lick his lips but his tongue seemed stiff. He could not move it.

He was fully conscious now, and thinking. The rule book says when a train has been derailed it is the duty of the trainman to send back a flag to protect following trains. Rule No. 99 describes the equipment and procedure. He even remembered Rule 99. It was a part of his training. Rule 99 says the flagman shall take a red light, a white light and a fusee, go back a safe distance, lay two torpedoes on the right rail, return half the distance to his train, place one torpedo on the rail and remain there until he has been

called in or until the expected train has arrived.

But Jimmie Malone could not go back half a mile. His leg was broken. Besides, he had no equipment. His lantern, the red light, the fusees, all had gone into the river with the engine. His befuddled brain was troubled. In his perplexity, he shoved his right hand down into his overall pocket, pulled out a torpedo and started wrapping the straps about his finger. He paused with the strap in his fingers. One torpedo!

Now one torpedo is a stop sign. If an engineer hits one, not two, he must stop at once. But in all Jimmie's two years he had never thought of it as such. Not once had he been called to flag with the loaded discs. Because rules had required their use he had carried them with him, had worn out the straps and thrown them away. Many a time he had fastened them upon the rail, had heard them explode, but they had meant little to him. Flagging equipment meant to him a lantern, a red light, a fusee; but tonight he had only one torpedo. His leg was broken, his jaw was broken, his sight was impaired. And back in the fog and the mists his father was thundering down to the landslide to certain destruction with Third No. 9.

HE SLIPPED the precious torpedo back into his overall pocket, glanced at the half buried form of Big Swede Anderson lying between the rails and, with a moan of pain, started crawling backward up the track. His broken leg trailed like a ball and chain. At two rail lengths he stopped. How could he ever go on? But then, third No. 9—his father was coming with third No. 9. There was no one else to go. If his father struck the landslide his engine and his train would go over into the roaring river.

On, on, back up the track he crawled. Gray fog was all about him. Mists were in his face. The waters of Great River roared and thundered far down on his left. At first he crawled over the rough ties and the ballast between the rails. He tried to count ties to measure his distance. But so bitter was the pain of his broken leg and broken jaw he lost his reckoning. Then he climbed atop the smooth rail, pulling his body along by his hands, counting rail joints. One—two—three. He lapsed into unconsciousness, lying on the rail.

He came to with a start. Was that the roar of 9? He listened. It was only the thunder of the waters. Once more he crawled—crawled like a worm. Sweat was on his face, though the temperature was almost freezing now. Tears were in his eyes, ran down his blood smeared face. Sounds came from his open mouth, a throaty gurgle. Soon he felt the track beneath him change. The rock ballast did not clutch at his dragging leg now. He shoved a hand down. It struck a tie. He moved it along the surface of the tie. It went through. There was no ballast. He was on the trestle—the last long trestle above Devil's Elbow which carried the track of the P & C across the river. A hundred feet below him tumbled the muddy waters. It was three hundred feet to the farther side. And third No. 9 was coming. He shuddered. If he made the other side, he could lay his torpedo and stop the train before she hit the slide. If he did not— Still moaning with pain he crawled on.

For what seemed an eternity his broken leg bumped over the ties. Water still boomed among the rocks below him. Echoes crashed among the cliffs above, were broken down, turned back to crash again. Into the mingled sound of thunder and echo came another sound. Faintly, miles away it seemed, the chimes whistle of a 3700 blasting out a trestle signal. Jimmie redoubled his efforts. He forgot his broken leg. Forgot it and crawled for life. Unless he could make the other side . . .

The whistle sounded again, closer now. A wall loomed up on his left. Or was it mist? He felt a vibration in the rail he was following—the vibration of an engine rushing down. White ballast was showing

dimly to his left, in front of him, below.

The whistle sounded again, almost upon him. One torpedo! Somewhere he had a torpedo. Into his pocket went his hand, fumbling, groping. Into his pocket and out again. One torpedo! He fumbled a second with the straps. A headlight broke the gloom in front. He laid the torpedo on the rail. The headlight was closer. It was almost upon him. He fastened the strap. A warning signal came from the whistle. His watching father had seen. He struggled for the side ditch, clawed madly with his hands, kicked with his left foot. But his right leg, his broken leg, he could not tell. The pilot was by him. The pilot wheel struck the torpedo. There was a boom. The cylinder rushed over him, something struck him, grabbed him. He screamed and went rolling.

Old Pat Malone whistled twice, shot his air into emergency and watched ahead. The train crossed the high trestle. In a cloud of smoke it rolled around the curve, crept toward the Devil's Elbow, stopped twenty feet from where Big Swede Anderson lay struggling to free himself from the sliding rocks which had pinned him down.

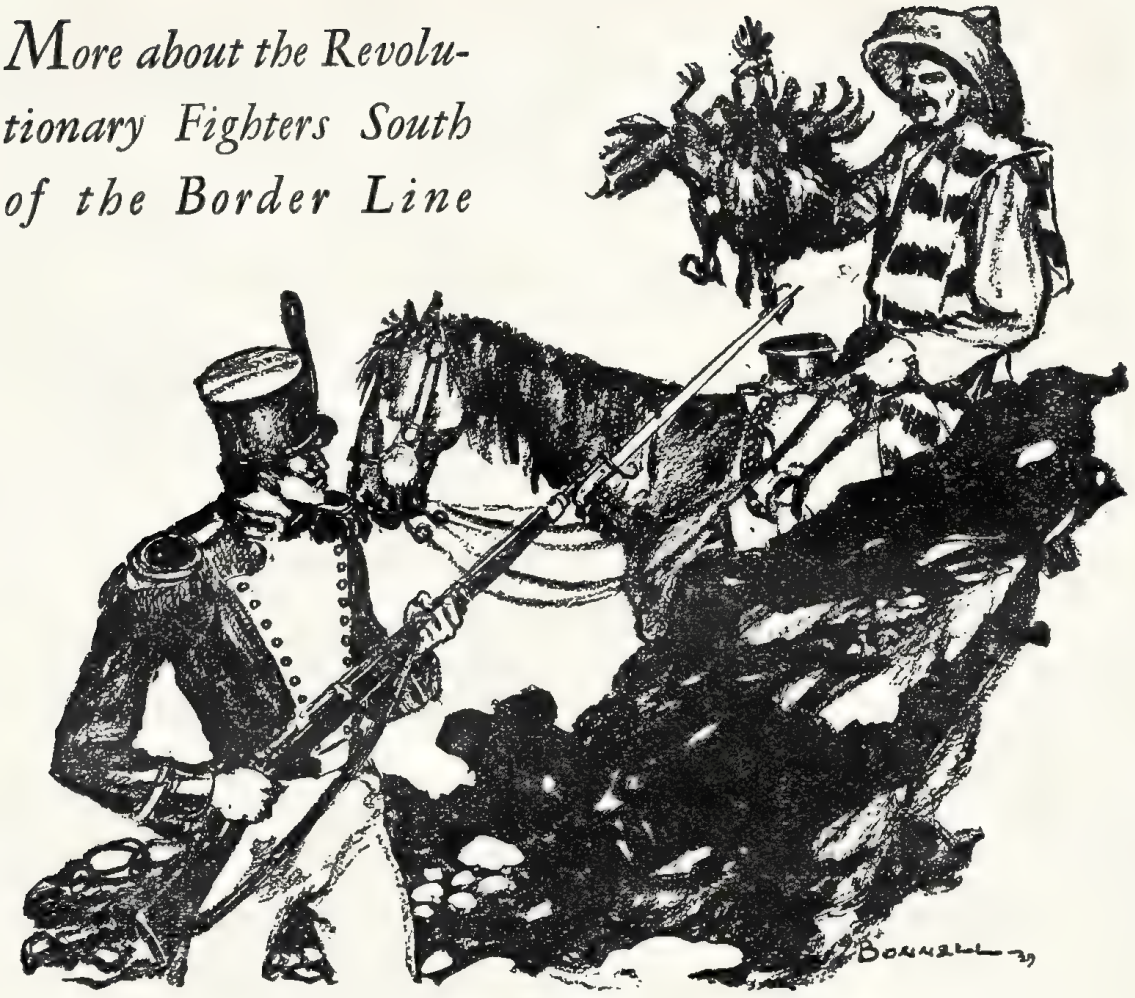
Out on the Mountain Division where the P & C has its writhing miles of steel across the southern Rockies and on into the West, where block signals drop restraining, ghostlike arms to guard each train in coming and in going, where trainmen gather in the hotel lobbies listening to music born in cities far away, they still tell this story of Jimmie Malone. Big Swede Anderson tells it oftenest—never tires of telling it.

"Jist like his dad, that little devil was," he will conclude while a boomer brakeman twirls the knobs, getting Station MJB. "Jist like his dad. Guts, nothin' but guts. An' fiddle, believe me, that boy can shore fiddle. Listen!"

Then over the magic waves comes the "Special", by Jimmie Malone. In it is blended all that went into the makeup of the last night on the rail—the fear, the hope, the anguish and the pain; all of the dark color of those awful hours.

They may not analyze it, these fearless, hard boiled veterans of the rail. But somehow when the tune is finished, they know that from them, in the person of the little one legged fiddler, has gone a hero, the bravest of them all.

More about the Revolutionary Fighters South of the Border Line



SKIRMISH

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

FROM the more or less peaceful pursuit of cattle rustling I had been unceremoniously—or, rather, ceremoniously — swept into the first movement of a revolution that was to last for upward of twenty years and bring a complete transformation in the mood, the civilization and the destiny of Mexico. Little did I suspect, when I was overtaken in the Chihuahua desert by the courteous but firm emissaries of Ricardo Flores Magon, that I was to be instrumental in launching the most powerful revolutionary movement that has broken out this side of the Atlantic since the War of Independence.

Yet, so it was. Chihuahua was already alive with small guerrilla parties, which kept the *rurales* busy day and night—that probably being the reason for the comparative ease with which I had been able to conduct my cattle business. Flores Magon was somewhere in the *sierra*, attempting to coordinate the move-

ments of his men; but, due to lack of communications, was not succeeding very well in keeping track of them. Much of the success of the haphazard campaign would have to depend on the initiative and audacity of the leaders in the field. It was for that reason, it was explained to me, that Don Ricardo had sent a troop to recruit my services as soon as his operations extended to the northern and central Chihuahua region.

In less than five minutes I had been transformed from a starving, thirsty fugitive, galloping at breakneck speed on a faltering pony to postpone for a few minutes a certain death, into the *jefe expedicionario* — expeditionary commander—of the Chihuahua revolutionists with, at that moment, more than one hundred men under my immediate command. My captors, Jimenez and Oviedo, had placed themselves at my orders, and showed a readiness to comply with all my wishes, except my possible wish to get away. I quickly sized them up for two upstanding *rancheros*, intelligent, generous, who had been goaded into revolt by the intolerable arbitrariness of the Diaz régime. They were hot all over with the idea of the revolution. But, although they knew how to fight personally and in small groups, they felt that they couldn't trust themselves to direct larger movements successfully.

As I walked with them to join the troop that had been chasing me under their leadership, they told me how they had picked my trail in the desert. They had caught no less than six of my men shortly after we disbanded and, explaining to them what was up, had induced them to reveal the direction in which I was trying to make my getaway. As soon as I had joined the troop, these pals came out to greet me. Jimmy Sears and Pepe Fuentes were among them.

Within fifteen minutes I was acquainted with the situation all over the region I was expected to harass. Flores Magon was somewhere in Durango, to the south, hoping to concentrate enough men and munitions to make an attack on Torreon, a crucial point in all Mexican military operations, due to the fact of its being a railway junction and the center of a rich district. Revolutionists were planted in some of the garrisons doing duty in the State of Sonora, to the west. Guerrillas were sniping at the Diaz troops throughout the length and breadth of the region. But they were evidently having so good a time on their own hook that Don Ricardo was finding it difficult to control them and move them according to any intelligent plan or for any clearly defined purpose. It was my job to help along in the harassing of the Federals and to try to bring about some sort of unity of action, at least in the Chihuahua, Durango and Sonora regions.

With this goal in view, I instantly conceived the plan of crossing the railway boldly with my small body of men and capturing El Parral, near the borderline of Sonora, and not far—as distances are reckoned in Mexico—from Durango and the line of march to Torreon. I talked this over with Jimenez and Oviedo while munching cold beans wrapped up in *tortillas* and drinking several pints of water. Then I was furnished with a horse, and gave the command.

We trotted in the noonday glare choked with dust. In about two hours, marching westward, we were entering more merciful lands. Trees began to appear here and there—not only *yoshuas* now but *banyans* and *ceibas*, and even a *flamboyan* burned the sky with its red flaming flowers. They were like sentinels of a cooler, more hospitable land; and we greeted them as mariners greet wreckage at sea, with great shouts and whoops. The spirit of the men was excellent. The revolution had taken hold of their imagination like a woman or a buried treasure; they felt feverish and boisterous about it. It had a battle cry that stirred them to the roots of their centuries-old dream of independence through the ownership of land. Here was the land all about them, shooting up trees, flowers and fruits, fattening cattle, but kept away from them by documents and laws passed with the

backing of bullets and the thrust of bayonets. Every tree was a flag waving in the breeze—their flag, the flag of the land. Passing a *flamboyan*, we stopped to pluck its red flowers and stick them in our sombreros as a symbol of the revolution.

Patches of green were becoming more frequent. We stopped in a village to replenish our supply of water. The people gave us food and *tequila* and cigarets and saw us off with loud "*vivas*." In the course of the afternoon we passed through several other small settlements, and had a hard time making the people understand that we had no means of carrying all the food, blankets and whatnot they brought to us with generous hands. We could use men, however, and by the time the sun began to cool our troop had increased to one hundred and fifty. The new recruits were armed with *machetes*, shotguns, revolvers and a variety of agricultural implements from axes to hoes. It was a prettier sight, let me tell you, than that of any well disciplined, well armed company of soldiers it has ever been my privilege to command.

WHILE leaving one of these villages I had no less a pleasure than that of meeting Governor Cachazas, coming in pursuit of Nogales, cow rustler, with something like a hundred state militia troops. His surprise must have been sharp enough when he came upon Nogales, the *jefe expedicionario*, instead, who quickly charged him at full gallop, riding sidewise from the village to save it from Cachazas' fire. The governor and his men had come to look for borrowers of cows, not for revolutionary gentlemen wearing red *flamboyan* flowers on their hats and charging in the name of a justice that had been too long delayed. He took to his heels while I waved him a salute with my sombrero, and his white whiskers, level now with the wind, were soon hidden by the dust.

Cachazas stampeded west and, as long as he seemed to be going in our direction, we followed him and made his life miserable with a running fusillade. We had to shoot through the dust and into the dust, from the head of our column. It was of no strategic advantage to defeat that body of state militia, and it was decidedly dangerous to follow it closely. Its members were surely headed for a place where they knew they would find protection and reinforcements. But by chasing them we could accomplish three things: we might get hold of several of the men, and grill them for information valuable to us; we would surely infer in what direction a strong body of their forces was located, for that's where he would be heading; and, last but by no means least, we might capture the old governor himself, and that stunt, besides being a pleasure, had too many implications of high practical value to be overlooked.

In the first place, the story of Cachazas' capture, spreading from village to village and from state to state, and carrying news of the revolution to all corners of the world, would make marvelous publicity for our cause. In the second place, we could hold his Most Excellent Whiskers for ransom, either in cash, in ammunition, or in military advantage. In the third place, we could induce him to give us secret information that might assure the triumph of the revolution, at least in the northern states. In the fourth place, we might get him to join the revolution, which was quite a possible development in the case of the type of Mexican politician to which Cachazas belonged, and in that case the bulk of the state troops would pass under our control, with the state arsenal and the state treasury at our disposal. And in the fifth place, everything else failing, we could at least shave his whiskers and thus deprive him of his respectability, his severe demeanor, his dignity, his moral authority and his political power.

Two of our men were caught in the backfire, and we picked off five of theirs. We may have wounded others, but Mexican riders have a way of clinging to their horses even when severely wounded, so that we could not be certain. I shouted to a group of my men to remain

with the wounded Cachazistas until I should send for them, and kept up the chase for a while longer. Then, as the Cachazistas turned a clump of tall *aya* trees and disappeared from view, I raised my hand for a halt.

Turning back, we took the wounded militiamen on a couple of spare horses, and flew on, northwest, while Cachazas presumably kept on running for his life and his whiskers southwest. I feared that if I pursued him too far, he might lead me into a trap. But now I knew, from the line of his flight, that a northwest course was safer for me than a southwest one, with the added advantage that, as the railway slanted eastward as it ran north, we would cross the tracks sooner by following our new tack.

When we came to the railway, somewhere between Chihuahua City and Carrizales, there was not a patrol in view along the level line of the plain. We had a fine chance to do something nasty to the tracks and embarrass traffic for twenty-four hours at least. But in the unorganized way in which the revolution was proceeding, I could not know whether that would prove to be advantageous or not. If Flores Magon was in a position to strike at the railroad successfully, it would be foolish to wreck his communications just before he took hold of them. If, on the other hand, the road was to remain in the hands of the Federals for an indefinite time, wrecking any part of it you came across would be exactly the thing to do. The men were for wrecking a stretch of it, of course. A Mexican revolutionist can't come across a track without wishing to uproot it, any more than Eve could find an apple without wanting to eat it. After thinking it over for a while, I prevailed upon the men to leave the tracks alone. We might be needing them shortly; and, anyway, it was bad policy to scare away normal traffic, insofar as such traffic is continued in abnormal times. The confidence of the government in the safety of the railway might keep us in food and ammunition later on. This argument, which I gave more for diplomatic than for practical reasons, was not only effective at the time, but proved to be quite correct sometime later.

CROSSING the tracks I pointed my horse due west, and led the march. The country here begins to rise in small undulations, and once in every long way you come upon a stream lazily waiting for the sun to dry it up. The soil, however, accumulates enough moisture from wind swept rains of the region to be all blossoming with the fresh greenness typical of the semi-tropical countries, a light and brilliant hue of color very different from the dark bronze green of northern vegetation. It rests your eyes and your body and your head to look at it. And it was good to travel once more in the fresh air, without sand biting at your throat all the time.

At nightfall, having met nothing more martial than a few cows on our way, we camped on the wooded shore of a small lagoon. Although the nights blow chilly in those parts, and again, although we hadn't caught sight of a single Diaz man after the Cachazistas disappeared, we could not afford to brighten the night with fireworks. I ordered three wide holes to be dug to the depth of about five feet, and at the bottom of each a fire was kindled. I divided my force into three parts and assigned to each part a fire to cook, to keep warm, and to tell fortunes as best they could. From a distance of fifty feet, only a vague glow could be perceived, against which the shadows of men and trees stood and moved about like dark ghosts.

For a while after eating I hung around the men, telling them stories of my fighting in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, in Santo Domingo, in one of the race wars between Santo Domingo and Haiti, where I had pushed the Haitians back across their border in the most perilous and picturesque mountain fighting it has ever been my privilege to take part in. I went on with stories of China and Alaska and, to my surprise the men

showed a lively interest in the anthropological theory that Mexicans—that is the original Aztec population—probably came to America from Asia through Alaska centuries ago, before the old god Quetzalcoatl had found the plumed serpent in the Mexican desert. They wanted to know more about it, more details; they thought that perhaps I could produce a diary of the march from Asia to the burning sands and high mountains of their native land; I think they even expected me to give them the lowdown on Quetzalcoatl himself. At any rate I talked on until the cool wind and the effects of the day's hard riding drove them to their blankets.

In my dealings with undisciplined fighters—especially those with Indian blood in their veins—I have found that the telling of bedtime stories is a powerful engine for creating in them loyalty and confidence in their chief. These ignorant but often strikingly intelligent men have a deep respect for knowledge of distant and large events when it is coupled with the ability to ride, to fight, to curse and to endure hardships. So that when I left the men huddled around the big fires and went myself in search of a good place to think and sleep, I knew that I had with me a much more effective force than I had had the day before. It is a curious combination, that of military chief and story telling minstrel in one, but I have certainly found it effective on more than one occasion.

Before going to sleep I took care of the wounded militiamen we had captured and brought with us. I looked into their wounds myself, dressed them with *tequila* and clean leaves, gave them cigarets and talked to them for a while. I could get no very valuable information from them, except that they were supposed to return to Chihuahua City after capturing me. And that, of course, was the direction in which Cachazas had been riding when we abandoned the chase. Leaving them, I wrapped myself in my *serape* on the shore of the lagoon and soon fell off to sleep, forgetting the big world of stars and plains and the smaller world of revolutions and gun play, until the swift dawn wind swept away the stars and it was time once more to remember everything you could possibly keep from forgetting.

In the clear morning light, I decided to put in some time in maneuvering. I picked out a level space among the hillocks on the western side of the lagoon and began teaching my men a sort of crude spiral charge. That is, a charge in which the horsemen get into a straight line side-by-side formation and approach the enemy in narrowing circles, presenting all the time the side of a single horseman as a target. It is a movement something on the order of the circling attack of the North American Indians, but it is fan-like, in close formation, instead of circular and helter-skelter. Performed with reasonable aptitude, it is very disconcerting to your opponents.

Forty-eight hours after forgetting Cachazas' whiskers floating worriedly in the wind, we reached the neighborhood of El Parral, a straggling adobe town that seems to have been spilled on the plain from the hills on its background. We had routed a small patrol a short time before, so the town was warned. I made up my plan of attack hurriedly with Jimenez, Oviedo, Pepe Fuentes, Sears and two or three others, explained it to the men as clearly as I could, and we began the job.

The troop spread out in a line as thin as butter on a tramp's handout, each man about ten yards from his neighbor. Thus it combed more than a mile of the plain, like a gigantic but largely toothless rake.

We charged at full speed from a distance of about three miles and soon we began getting it from the windows, the housetops and the streets opening on the plain. The Diaz fire could not be very effective when directed at such a straggling and shifting line, for each horseman, of course, zigzagged, backed and pirouetted to his heart's content, and the ground was sufficiently irregular to make machine gun fire ineffective. Bullets aimed as high as a horse's neck would

be likely to hit a boulder and bury themselves in a mound of earth before reaching their mark. Only rifle fire, handled by sharpshooters, could be of any service to the enemy.

Still, as we drew nearer, some of my men began to tumble from their saddles, and I knew it was time to change the formation. According to the plan we had arranged, I gave the signal, and the men drew together in three groups, each of which formed into a side-by-side single line facing the town in profile, as we had practised it near the lagoon. Then each of the lines began to circle the town, and its defenders had to keep firing on three widely separated units which were constantly changing position at a dead run and which presented no more of a target than the outline of a galloping horse and its rider.

Of course, the inside rider was occasionally picked off the saddle and either sprawled to the ground or rode away to the shelter of a mound or a rock, clinging to the mane of his horse. But generally speaking, the Diaz fire made very little impression in our circling fan lines, and we were always at them from three sides at once. We could do no firing whatever, naturally. We just kept coming closer and closer in a silent, swift and bewildering manner. The psychology of this attack is perfect. Men are never so unnerved by a frantic assault as by a cool, quiet, assured, relentless, self-confident approach. There is a feeling of fate about it. In the face of it the weapons in the hands of the besieged seem to them in an obscure way as ridiculous as so many popguns — ineffective, crazy, making a big noise for nothing.

And then, we kept them running from one end of the town to the other, from east to west, from north to south, and back again; and all that foolish confusion to ward off the attack of men who didn't even seem to be paying any attention to them, but just riding around and around like a bunch of kids on a frolic. It must have been like a nightmare to the poor Federals.

AFTER circling the town over a dozen times, and having approached to within less than a quarter of a mile of its houses, I gave the prearranged signal by having all the men in my column fire their guns into the air at once. The three columns, veering suddenly, made for the entrance nearest to them in single file and at top speed. One from the east, one from the northwest, and one from the south. The Federals leveled their whole machine gun and rifle fire at us. Few casualties resulted, as we were riding, as I have said, single file. They then withdrew precipitately to the *plaza*, and from there to the church which covers one side of it. That is what happened at my end of the town. The Diaz men at the other two entrances had held out longer, and when they came rushing into the *plaza*, they found my men on their way. Caught between two fires, they thought best to surrender. They were quickly disarmed and locked up in the hoosegow.

Then we turned on those that had taken refuge in the church. When we began pelting the clay walls with two of their own machine guns, they decided to surrender themselves. A white rag was flown from the steeple and, as we ceased fire, an officer came out to parley. I stipulated that the men were to come out of the church one by one and throw their weapons down in the middle of the *plaza*. The common soldiers were to be freed forthwith, and the officers were to be retained as prisoners, serving as hostages against possible depredations by the men that I knew were scattered through the houses of the town. This was a much more lenient peace than a Mexican officer expects and, as I found out later, they agreed to it without believing that I would keep my word. It's a tough world down there.

After taking what precautions I could to ward off a surprise attack, either from outside the town, or from the men hidden in the houses, I lined some men on their bellies with their rifles trained on the entrance of the church, and the disarming

began. One by one the soldiers came out, threw their equipment down under a *ceiba* tree, and walked away unmolested. Nearly two hundred men, among them the officer I had talked to and another one, came out of the church during this ceremony. Then a search of the building revealed three poor devils in their underwear, and a further search brought to light three officer's uniforms, bundled away in the closet where the priest kept his sacred vestments. The officers had escaped disguised as common soldiers. I didn't find it in my heart to be angry at any one except myself for being so careless.

Immediately after this I went to a printshop and dictated a proclamation to the typesetter. We came in the name of liberty and justice, to free the people from the intolerable oppression of the Diaz régime and give them a square deal as to the land that had been fraudulently taken away from them by centuries of despotism and, more particularly, by the Diaz gang. Then I had a little handbill made up, to be distributed throughout the town, at least one in each house. It called for the surrender of all those that were in hiding, on the most liberal terms, explaining how those that had already surrendered had been treated. With a touch of the American sense of humor I had acquired during my cowboy days, I congratulated the officers who had excaped from the church in disguise for putting one over on Nogales and offered them the same terms of surrender. I knew that they could not have left El Parral. Then I closed every grog shop in town and made an inventory of my resources.

I now had over two hundred extra rifles, three machine guns and one field piece. First I distributed rifles to those of my men who only had agricultural implements to fight with. After that, I had enough material left for one hundred and fifty men more.

One of the officers that had left the church surreptitiously proved to be an old friend, Jacinto Castanedos, a fine fellow who had become quite chummy with me in Tampico several years before. At that time he had been a captain. Now he was still a captain. I saw clearly that he would be for the revolution. You can't keep a man being a captain for long in the Mexican army without sooner or later turning him into a revolutionary general. I was quite right in this case. Castanedos came into my force without a definite title—for we were not bothering about titles—but with more good will than he had been enjoying in the Federal army. I would take him to Flores Magon, and Don Ricardo would probably give him a command of his own. Castanedo vouched for one hundred and fifty of his soldiers and I took them on.

Leaving El Parral in the cool of the evening, before the grog shops could be assaulted, we started marching southwest. It was my intention to get to the junction of the Chihuahua, Sonora and Durango border lines and there to see in which direction it would be more useful to strike. I hoped, also, to get in touch with Flores Magon and find out definitely what were his plans, although by this time, judging from the scattered information I had received, I was realizing that the revolution had broken out too hastily and had no appreciable centralized control.

The next morning, shortly after we had broken camp, we had a running fight with a couple of companies of Federals, and all day long we were chasing each other. This game kept up for three days, and had taken us deep into the State of Durango when an infantry brigade appeared on the horizon, and we had to run for our lives. It was not until we lost ourselves in the Durango *sierras* that all signs of pursuit disappeared.

We left the *sierras* to the west and began a cautious march in the direction of Torreon which, from what I could make out, was Flores Magon's main objective at the moment. Torreon, of course, would be very well defended, and the territory around it closely patrolled; but for all I knew Don Ricardo might have been pushing successfully along that line.

ALL ALONG the way I saw signs of hard fighting. Badly buried bodies presented a ghastly sight at regular intervals along our trail. Once I saw an arm sticking out of the earth clutching a rusty automatic. From one tree a dozen men were swinging by the neck, their clothes torn and their bellies eaten by buzzards. And Flores Magon was nowhere to be located. I knew that he must have been very closely pressed by the Federals and couldn't afford to hang around any particular place for a long time just waiting for me.

For three weeks we carried on a high pressure guerrilla warfare around Torreon, sneaking in and out of the Federal lines. Once I harassed a large body of troops by developing my fan movement around their camp at breakfast-time and keeping the Federals away from their coffee and *tortillas* until noon. The general in command of these troops, I learned later, was Victoriano Huerta, at that time a good officer, three years later president of the republic.

I kept sending frantic messages in all directions. With a little organization, Torreon, with all its supplies and rail facilities, would have been ours. But no satisfactory response ever came. Such isolated groups as my couriers located were having too hard a time keeping themselves alive to believe in the immediate efficacy of a concerted movement. Therefore, our flanks were always exposed, our retreat was constantly in danger of being cut, and the buzzards circled above us with greedy and hopeful eyes.

After a while we began discovering the skeletons of our own men—we crossed and recrossed the same terrain so often! All this was good sport, but it did not seem to lead anywhere in particular, certainly not to justice and liberty.

Driven to the defensive, we only fought now when we had to, or whenever we had a chance of ambushing the Federal cavalry. We ran like hell, shifted our position like the devil and, once in a while, scored a small victory. Dozens of *rurales*, militiamen and regulars bit the dust, but were immediately replaced by others. Our horses were worn out, the men had lots of pep left in their hearts but very little in their muscles. Day after day and week after week of campaigning without medical attendance, feeding mostly on *tortillas* and beans, going often without water for endless hot hours, and always on the verge of a fight against superior odds, had dwindled our little force to less than one hundred men.

Fresh troops are good fighters, but they are never quite as good as starved troops in a desperate mood. It was probably due to this that we succeeded in taking the hamlet of La Concepcion, near the rail town of Carrizales, by storm, without any plan or organization whatever; just with the audacity born of desperation. We simply rushed into the town and grabbed it. Then hell broke loose.

The men went wild, plundered the shops and *tequila* joints, and robbed the citizens, in spite of all I could make to prevent it. I shot three of them myself and had a loyal firing squad do away with two others that had been trying to overpower a barmaid; but hell went on. In the meantime, the *rurales*, who had been after us all day, entered La Concepcion, and it was all I could do to leave by the opposite entrance with the twenty-five men whom I had made into my bodyguard, all of them half drunk at that.

We couldn't have been more than a couple of miles from La Concepcion when we heard the regular crackle of the firing squads executing my drunken companions.

Two days later we were at our old corral in the Santa Catalina cañon. We had scrapped our way there as best we could, without food or drink, and would have flopped on the bottom of the damp ravine to die of starvation if we hadn't found two of our stray cows grazing peacefully on the mosses that grew around the spring. Their beef revived us and there we spent a week of the most thoroughgoing loafing I have ever enjoyed in my life.

Pepe Fuentes, whom I had sent on a scouting expedition to the vicinity of Carrizales, was captured by the Federals and shot. Miguel, another of my men, sent after him, reported that he had come upon his body propped up against a cactus, shot full of holes, a burnt out cigaret dangling from the lips. During my acquaintance with Pepe Fuentes, who wished to commit one big villainy that would allow him to lead a respectable life for evermore, I had done what I could to help him realize his ambition. I had failed. But, at least, I had helped him to die a respectable death: he had died a revolutionist, not a thief.

One night the sentries announced the approach of two horsemen through the cañon. They were duly captured and brought to the ravine. One of the two, a bearded man of about sixty, had a couple of chickens in his hand, and he made me a present of them, while he greeted me in a familiar voice.

"*Que tal, Coronel?*" he said. "How are you, Colonel?"

I recognized him as the old Pancho Villa — the original Pancho Villa, not Arango, who adopted his name after the old bandit's death because he knew how effective it was. He was a nice old chap.

He brought me a letter from a wealthy rancher of Coahuila by the name of Francisco Madero, whom Porfirio Diaz and his crowd had branded a lunatic and a visionary. He was the man whose name, in one short year, was to be heard all over the world as the conqueror of Diaz. I did not know Madero personally —and he was not very widely known at that time—but I had heard some of my men speak very highly of him. In his letter, Madero advised me not to throw up the sponge; to keep going with my men at whatever cost, because the spark of revolution would never die out in Mexico until Diaz was overthrown. In those days, outside of Victoriano Huerta and to some extent Madero, the future presidents of Mexico were obscure men. Carranza was a justice of the peace in Coahuila; Obregon was a petty rancher in Sonora; and Calles was a village school teacher, also in Sonora. They were essentially products of the *revolucion socialista* launched by Flores Magon, of which, to judge from Madero's letter, I remained the only active representative at the moment.

I wrote to Madero, through Pancho Villa, saying that I would do what I could. But my circumstances were very precarious. Deprived of some of my best lieutenants, my force reduced to twenty-five men—good ones, it was true—with practically no food supplies and in possession of a negligible amount of ammunition, I was not equipped to make much of a dent in the hard boiled, well equipped, well paid Diaz machine.

One year later the revolution had broken out full force, and its wide lines were closing on Mexico City, while Madero, a civilian, was advancing from town to town in a triumphant march. But Nogales was not there. It had been his fate to have fought successfully when the revolution was fighting unsuccessfully. Now that the revolution was fighting to victory, many generals that had fought to defeat, rode with it to its fulfillment. Hard luck! But, after all, what I like best is to be in the thick of things, not in the banquets afterward, when the speeches are made and the rewards distributed to the great and to the greedy at one and the same time.

When Madero was spreading his victory over Mexico, I was again in the thick of things, this time in my own Venezuela, where the fall of Castro and the usurpation of Gomez had called me once again to high adventure.

But it is an abiding pleasure to have fired the first shots in a revolution like the Mexican revolution—so powerful that its violence and works endure to this day.

The INFORMER

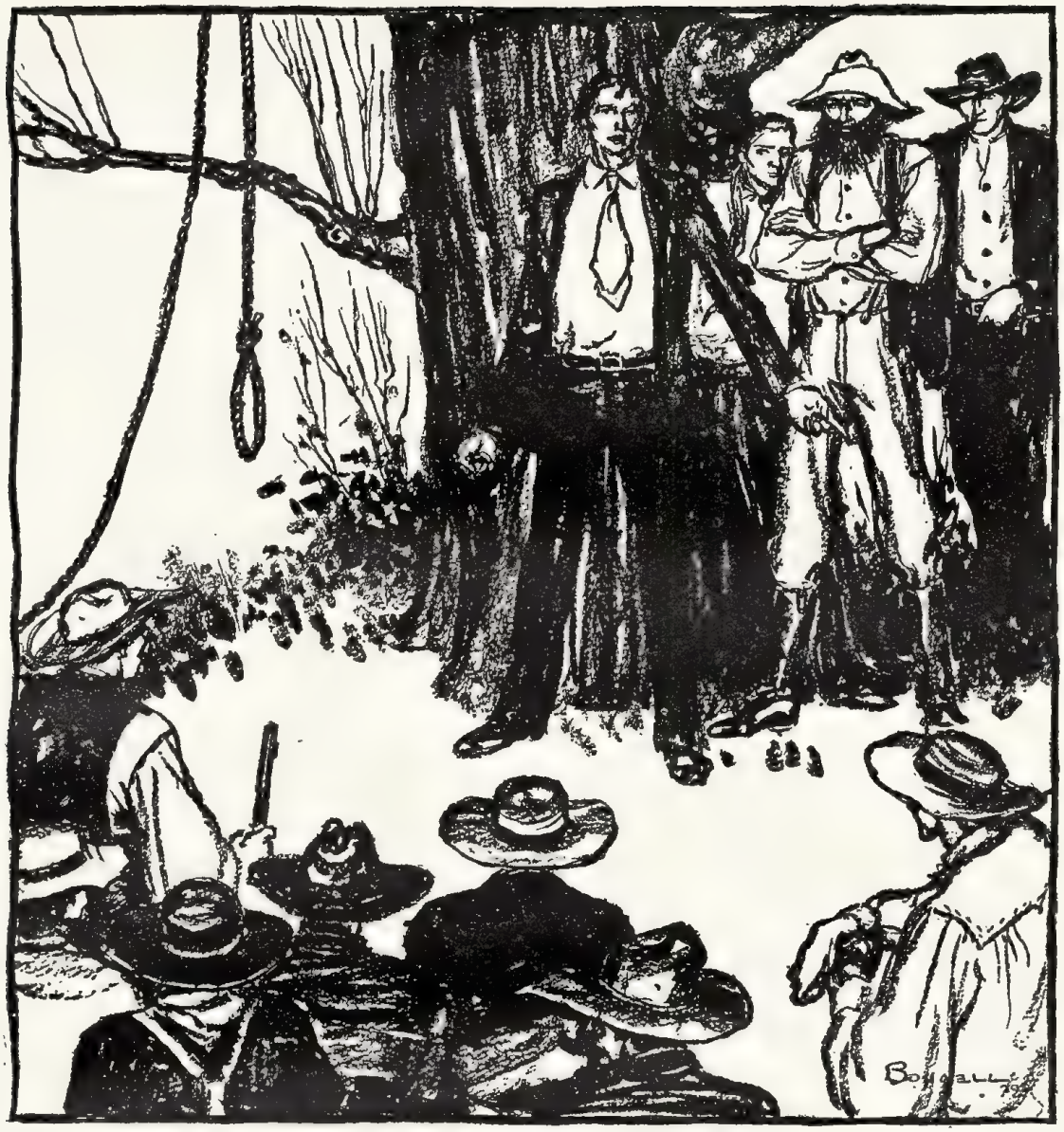
An Absorbing Tale of the Cumberland Mountaineers

By FISWOODE TARLETON

FROM the window of the Leeston *Argus* office, over the bank, Rackteen could see the mottled clay road from end to end. Main Street baked by the hot sun of the Cumberland dog days, Main Street silent and deserted, cleared of beasts and men during the brassy noon. Rackteen watched the figures of drowsy men under the porticos, hillmen who whittled and sometimes whispered. Tight bellied hounds panted in the shade of the elms. Chickens and hogs wandered aimlessly along the boardwalk. Mules hung their heads at the hitch-racks.

After awhile a hillman slid off a mule and joined those who sat or lay under the porticos. A whiskered hillman pulled at his beard. Another jerked his wide brimmed hat farther down over his eyes. A hog stared into a dry wallow in the road and backed away. A cow raised its head, pointed its nose upward and bellowed mournfully. Then movement froze again. Men stopped their whittling and closed their eyes from the glare of Main Street. Life suspended. Leeston held in apathy.

Not another movement. Minute after minute of stillness. Not another sign of life until Rackteen himself stretched and drew eyes from under the porticos. He



sat on the window sill and looked across at the courthouse, saw the forms of men stretched out under the elm trees in the courthouse yard. Saw the big feet of the jailer, Saul Bankey, pushed out the window of the sheriff's office.

A little stir of air in the room brought the odor of newsprint to his nostrils, made him turn to look back at the high desk in the corner; returned his mind to his work, brought a craving for something to happen, something to fill his paper, something to relieve the monotony of setting up announcements of sheriff's sales and other boresome reading. Something besides the stereotyped advertisements of the business stores. Something he could throw himself into and write with color and with drama.

"I never saw a town so dead," he told himself. "I'm tired of rehashing stuff from the city papers. I'm tired copying."

Rackteen's mind dwelt upon the lifeless last three weekly editions of his paper, *The Argus*. Nothing vital had happened in weeks, nothing that was interesting. He thought of the city newspaper editors with whom he had effected ex-

changes and from whom he used to receive letters drawing attention to the vitality, the color, the facility he had for pulling at the heart strings of men through his dramatic news reports of the hinterland dramas. As he gazed absently at the courthouse he recalled the letter he had received from the owner of a chain of newspapers.

"When you meet up with any more of those vivid, low toned stories of your people, send them to me. I can buy all you can write. I can make it worth your while," the letter had said.

And Rackteen's blood began to pound again because of opportunity. He made mind pictures of his work, his studies of his own strange people, creating a furore in an editor's sanctum. He day-dreamed of themes common in the lives of the Cumberlander and imagined they were being acted before him. In his dreams he wished for the materialization, the crystallization of ideas, ideas that had been born of his contacts with nature and men. He day-dreamed of his long epic poem of Appalachia. In the silence and apathy of noonday he lived over his saga.

A dry-land sled came down Main Street, crunching and grinding on the hard baked clay. The dry-land sled, drawn by two undersized, scrawny mules and loaded with sacks of corn, drew up in front of the general store. The mountain driver got out and sat down under the porticos with the idlers, filled his mountain clay pipe and, pulling his wide brimmed hat down over his eyes, became a watcher of the silent, lifeless road.

The newcomer dispelled the mind pictures of Rackteen and gave him thoughts, abstract thoughts. He wondered about that strange secret of the force that makes hillmen feel something impending. Like all mountaineers of the deep hinterlands Rackteen's being at times felt the light touch of action preparing, of drama, tragedy, climax. The pressure of silence and inaction had always affected him that way. When things got too peaceful he always felt the light brush of the "thing"; the thing that seemed to hover around the town, camouflaging itself in the reigning silence and peace. Oddly he looked upon it as fermentation of a hate; an unseen, subtle something that true to its cycle passed into the blood of the sons of men. A yeast.

"I've never seen things so peaceful," he said to himself. "And, if I know anything, it's a bad omen."

The apathy became even heavier as Rackteen's eyes shifted from the courthouse to the line of unmoving men under the porticos. Men who had been whittling put their knives away and began to doze. Men who had been whispering leaned back against the walls of the business stores and covered their faces with their hats. The heads of the dreamy mules hung lower. The chickens stood motionless in the dust. The hogs lay under the elms and the cow stared, dull eyed and unmoving.

As Rackteen felt the weight of the inaction he thought of the past troubles in the town. He could match up for every war, every drama, a prologue of peace. The election wars; the gouging fights of a Saturday evening; the sudden appearance of the Clay family in his office with rifleguns because he had written a defense of the schoolteacher Scopes; the day the circus came to town when the mulatto man slid over into the white folks' seats and was mowed down by rifle fire; the last hanging, when the mountain murderer sang a song on the scaffold—all these things followed a perfect peace.

Rackteen turned again to look at the feet of Saul Bankey, the jailer, sticking out the window of the courthouse. His eyes were flicked by the head of the white horse of the sheriff framed in the stable window. Even this spirited Blue Grass animal felt the grip of heavy inertia that hovered over the town.

At the most silent moment, when the stillness tightened like a drum, a yell—a prolonged mountain yell—ripped the air of noonday, entered Rackteen's ear and, seeming to mingle with his blood, curdled and gave him the creeps.

HE SAW men jump up under the porticos and move swiftly to the door of the restaurant. The corner of his eye saw the form of the sheriff, Floyd Jett, coming down the boardwalk on the run, and the jailer following. Rackteen took two leaps to his door and, down the stairs in long bounds, dashed across the baked road and became a part of the dense mass of men in the restaurant crowding around something on the floor that had been a few minutes before a human form.

Hardened hillmen looked away. Some turned to look out the windows of the eating house. Some looked at the bare wall. Rackteen, crowding through, took one look and whirled around. When the sheriff jerked a cloth from a table and covered the sight on the floor, he sent a hillman after Doc Carr. Then there was more silence for a few minutes while men looked at each other, men whose eyes showed that the image had burned its way into their brains. Rackteen gave little shakes to his head, vain attempts to get rid of the picture. Glowing ribbons dangled before his eyes as he turned to look at Floyd Jett who was passing his head before his eyes.

"I'll guess at who it was," said the sheriff to Turk O'Gowd, the restaurant keeper. "You saw his face when he—had one! It was Keir Meadowes."

Turk stood as if transfixed, pale as if his blood had drained to his feet. He swallowed two or three times, tried to speak. His lips moved but his voice had gone. He had to nod—a quick succession of nods at the sheriff.

Men began turning their faces toward the wall again, began to look out the windows as Doc Carr came in and had a look at the body; and as four hillmen at a sign from Jett carried it down to the back part of the store, far into a corner, Doc Carr said:

"Dead. Mighty dead."

Folks kept coming. The restaurant filled.

"Find your voice now, Turk," said the sheriff. "Who-all did that piece of work? Quick!"

The restaurant keeper's voice, though it returned, was husky; it grated against Rackteen's ears.

"Farrels," he said.

"Farrels?" repeated Jett, who seemed to be one of the few who heard the hoarse whisper.

"Which Farrels?" asked the sheriff.

"Duckhead," said Turk, regaining his voice. "From Duckhead."

"You mean Luke's boys? Moses and Jonah?

"Yes. Moses and Jonah. Hit happened sudden-quick. Keir eatin' victuals. A-sittin' in 'at seat thar an' eatin' when Farrels come in. Purty quick I seed knives a-flashin'. I seed knives a-makin' a kind o' wheel around Keir. Keir mowed down by 'at wheel o' knives. I got sick."

"Where'd the Farrels go?" asked Sheriff Jett.

"Don't know. I got sick. I seed Keir in the middle o' the wheel o' knives; seed him go down—way down. I seed the buildin' go aroun'. I held tight to the counter thar and had ter watch Keir go down."

"Huh," said Jett.

Rackteen wanted to try his voice.

"They didn't escape out front, Floyd."

Several hillmen shook their heads.

"Farrels didn't pass we-uns out front," one of them said.

Jett walked swiftly to the rear of the building, followed by Rackteen and the others, saw that the whole pane of glass was knocked out, put his head through the window and saw the fragments scattered on the lane that ran back of the business stores.

Rackteen, Jailer Bankey and another deputy sheriff, Luke Foraker, who appeared suddenly through the crowd in the store, gathered around Jett.

"That forest yonder," said Jett, pointing at a heavily wooded hill beyond a cluster of houses, "is where they found their first cover. I'll follow 'em straight. You, Luke, follow the branch to the left of the hill with another man or two. Rackteen, you go to the right of the hill—

keep going plenty to the right. The signal will be three shots if any of you need help. Let's go to the office for carbines. I don't want a lot of men. Don't trust posses in a case like this."

Rackteen followed the sheriff out the window. Luke Foraker followed Rackteen with a hillmen he began to swear in as the officers hurried up the lane to the courthouse. Armed with Winchesters from the rack in the sheriff's office, the four men took up the pursuit as outlined by the county officer.

Beyond the clump of houses that lay between Leeston and the low forested hill, Rackteen said to Jett, as they ran along:

"Wonder why those Farrels carved Keir out of the world thataway? Why didn't they just shoot him or stab him once?"

The sheriff looked at Rackteen curiously.

"Maybe they haven't got a god. Like wild horses without bridles. Maybe they thought everything had to be finished in this world, like some others think."

"That's a hot dig at me, Floyd."

"Well, here's the branch, so hustle. And listen. Don't take chances. Bring down Moses and Jonah. Hell! Look at that mob coming!"

Rackteen, wheeling around, saw two score men following at a distance. Most of them were armed. He wondered at the miracle of hillmen producing rifleguns so quickly from apparently nowhere. Forty hillmen came on in their long springy strides, either not understanding Jett's gesture for them to stop and go back, or ignoring it.

"Well, I'm going," said Rackteen, bounding across the branch to the other side and disappearing under a row of cucumber trees and in the waist high laurel.

When Rackteen stood by the slow moving waters again in a few minutes where the creek bed straightened, he saw the forty hillmen reach the foot of the hill and begin to spread, fan out. Eight or ten that made the tip of the human fan moved down the creek bed after him. The center of the fan moved up the slope, following Jett, who had given up stopping the mob and was trying to keep ahead.

HURRYING faster, Rackteen did not pause again until he had left the wing of the posse out of sight. He had an aversion to crowds in a matter like this, particularly because he could not think unless alone. And besides the main issue, which was to capture the murderers, Rackteen gave more than half his mind to the psychology of brutality. He kept telling himself as he hurried to keep in advance of the posse that when Moses and Jonah Farrel made their wheel of knives around Keir, they were going back thousands of years; they had had no appreciation of the niceties of murder, no more than a caveman.

He crossed to the other bank of the creek bed.

"That was a hot shot the sheriff handed me. Wish I had thought to ask him one thing, just one. Wish I had asked him—"

When Rackteen came to a turn in the creek bed and saw that, forking away from the branch, a thin and narrow stream of water hurried to tumble down the edges of a cove several hundred feet beyond, he paused undecided and leaned against a sapling. For the first time he gave his mind wholly to the work of reasoning which direction the fugitives might have taken. Way back near the town the Farrel brothers probably climbed the hill. In the cover of the forest on the slope they changed their tactics; they did not do anything so obvious as to go straight over the hill. Every hillman knows something about the natural and expected tactics of posses. The Farrels thought things out. They knew they were gone if they ever got into the center of a cordon. They knew enough to keep outside its probable ends. Even before they did the killing their line of escape was laid out in their minds.

Knowing the country, knowing well almost every inch of the ground between where he stood and the railroad, Rack-

teen was moved by a hunch that the Farrels would make for the railroad or for the domain of their folks, to be hidden out. He saw that in either event they would double back to the branch and pretty near follow the right fork down to the cove and through, and lose themselves in the low hills bordering the Duckhead. There they would escape by jumping a freight train or be hidden by their people in one of those caves whose entrances defy detection, unless bloodhounds are put on the track. The bloodhounds were in Anathoth on the railroad, at the edge of the county, kept there by a local deputy. Trained man jumpers that they were, and expert trackers, they were not used often for mountain whites; the highlanders had a way of picking off dogs from ambush, and the dogs were valuable and used for the most part for trailing black men who trod on white men's toes at Anathoth, the railroad town.

"The forty hillmen—not counting myself—ought to capture only two," Rackteen told himself. "Some of those forty, maybe all of them, have been waiting for years for a chance to lay a Farrel low. Those who stayed in town and didn't join the posse were satisfied that a Meadowes had been cut out of the world. Men shift to sides of a cause, roll into their places in family wars like marbles."

Rackteen's mind searched back into the past; tried to recall any trouble his people had had with the Farrels and could think of none. This heartened him as he went down the creek bed road. Now and then he made mental pictures of a wheel of knives; presently he left the open creek bed for the wooded banks. He was a part of the posse, a part of the man hunt. He was not afraid or he would have waited for others to reenforce him. There was purpose in his sticking to the particular branch, the right fork of Duckhead Creek. A mile farther on he stopped abruptly, and under the cover of the laurel that grew in a tight patch by the creek bed he looked ahead and studied.

His mind returned, oddly, to the problem of filling his newspaper. He wondered if he would get something out of the murder that would lift his sheet from the deadly, boresome, flat thing it had been for weeks. He wondered if it would be his chance to impress the Louisville paper with his correspondence; wondered if deep down in the atrocity there was anything but nausea; if there were a single human element, a trace of anything but the work of beasts.

Then, little by little, the hill contours, the series of ledges jutting out from the sides of the hills throwing their wide shadows, and a sudden widening of the creek bed, told him exactly where he was. He recalled that under one of those ledges beyond him was a cave in which as long as he could remember hillmen had stabled their mules. Up the slope of the hill above the cave a cabin hidden in the forest and surrounded with tough rhododendron and merciless greenbrier, the domain of the Farrels. He could see faintly the mouth of the trail that led upward, winding its way, engineered so that many sudden turns concealed an ambush.

After fifteen minutes of waiting and listening and watching, a restlessness gripped him. He rose and stepped out to the edge of the creek bed road and advanced slowly. When he came to the mouth of the cave he stopped. He peered in. He could hear mules shifting their feet and near the entrance he could see the eyes of one. He heard a rustle and, wheeling around, faced a wild hog—a boar with long tusks that stepped out of a laurel patch. Lean razorback hog, built like a deer, wild and fearless, braver than a wildcat, a match for three dogs, the most dangerous beast of the mountains.

Rackteen knew the futility of trying to drive the boar away, knew that the instant he made a step forward the beast would charge. He knew the cruelties reflected in the almond shaped eyes that looked at him from under layers of bristling flesh. He knew there was only one thing to do if he wanted to continue down the creek bed road, and that was to shoot the beast. But such a course was

full of risks. There would the report of rifle fire, and the probability of some hillman's claiming ownership of the hog. There would be the alarm of the shot, and maybe the misleading of Jett and the posse.

HE BACKED into the cave, into the blackness that fell over him like a pall. He felt the rump of a mule and the drawing of its muscles in time to leap to the side. The mule's hoof made a wind as they shot out past his head. He looked back of him into the heart of the cavern and saw nothing; intense blackness, a core of shadow. He heard nothing but he was not deceived. He had the hillman's strange feel of a presence, an uncanny gift that began to work in him and was about to influence him to shoot the wild hog and make his escape to the sunshine and the waters of the branch when he felt himself—all of him—held as if in a stock.

More than one pair of hands had him in a vise-like grip. He was pulled back slowly and when he managed to get his head around in an effort to see his captors not even the hands were visible that held his arms. He was pulled way back into that pocket of blackness and his rifle taken from him. Then he was released. He stood for several minutes quite still, then began to feel around. He touched a wall of the cave and sat down, his back against it. Somewhere near there was the faint breathing of several men—three men, he thought—and for some time he listened to them. Mostly the breathings came separately, but there was a difference in their time. Rackteen heard them merge together, then separate, then come together again. One fast, one slow, and one very slow. That was the trivial way he passed more than a quarter of an hour—listening to the breathings.

Finally he tired of it, and his mind slowly turned to speculation. He had no doubt to begin with that the Farrel boys were his captors. But there was another man, and this other man's identity was what he, Rackteen, was trying to solve, first with guesses, then with his own peculiar method of reasoning from a given point. Rackteen, like all hillmen, had to have all the aspects, all the characteristics of a situation in mind as far as they could be grasped before he made a move, before he began to think of ways out. He wanted in true hill fashion to know the status of every son of man that was against him. He knew that sooner or later he would say something, but he sat that idea aside with other ideas.

"One man's breathing faster," he told himself, and his mind fell upon the fact. His philosophy churned in his head over that, his reasoning sifted out, after awhile, a kernel of thought and his logic built upon it.

"You breathe faster as you get old," he said to himself. "The third man is older. He's sharing the risk of the other two. He's kin to them. Close kin. Back to back and blood to blood. Huh!"

A procession of the Farrels seemed to be parading before Rackteen. His mind's eyes saw them come out of the trail mouths that lead from far mountains—the Farrels, the Corngames, the Hatwoods, the Duckhead Valentines. Down to fourth cousins. Then he let them all disappear but one. The pappy of Moses and Jonah.

Unconsciously almost he spoke the name of that one, Noah, and after that he heard a stir, a scraping, as if a pair of booted feet had been suddenly shifted. And he heard that fast breath held for an instant. The third man had betrayed himself. Noah, the pappy of the boys. Rackteen was glad.

The past invaded the present in Rackteen's mind. The great grandpappy of Noah stood before Rackteen's mind's eyes, a dim figure. Then Rackteen's own grandpappy came; he saw two men, two of the fighting Colonials who hell-drove the British and took King's Mountain; two of the raw troops that saved America were mental images before him and reminded him of a gallantry. A gallantry

handed down by word of mouth through generations, yet losing none of its strength, its power to move. Thinking of the gallantry brought a scene to Rackteen's mind: a hillside, moving figures on it. Men in red coats clashing with a motley in jeans. Smoke of gun fire veiling the upturned faces of wounded patriots. Rackteen saw his great grandpappy and the great grandpappy of Noah Farrel stooping behind a brush cover, sharpshooters picking off the British. The intensity of the drama related on down from generation to generation made Rackteen see every detail, the company of British creeping up behind the two lone defenders of the position, the rifle ball crippling the leg of the Colonial, Farrel. The left arm of his own grandpappy shattered by a shot from the creeping redcoats. His grandpappy dragging Farrel through the bushes, then carrying him on his back through the wilderness to the Colonial camp, staggering through the forest with his comrade for miles, while the blood seeped from his body.

Rackteen knew that way down in the souls of Noah and his boys the story was laid away. Tradition, strong in the Appalachian hillman, was preserved way down in them. Gratitude was buried deep, too, buried with the hates for others. There was a debt that had never been paid. The sons of the sons of the sons of Wallace Farrel who was rescued by the grandpappy of Rackteen at King's Mountain tucked the debt way down in themselves and waited—for the chance to balance the scales.

Rackteen had thought many times that when he was pressed, if he ever was, when he needed backing, support, defense, there would be the Farrels waiting; there would be as powerful a family behind him as any in the mountains.

THE EDITOR of the *Argus* suddenly, in his day dreaming, in that mystical maze of mind of his, saw scales, scales always tipping, never settling. A disturbing unbalance. He always saw life that way in his hills. The sons of men always trying to even out something; adding a measure of good for good and bad for bad, to balance the scales.

And as suddenly his mind returned to the *Argus*, his paper. Its unfilled columns. And from the *Argus* his mind came to grips with the larger scheme, the drama, the color, the soul he wanted to pack into his writing for the syndicate—the truth he wanted to tell about his misunderstood race.

He felt that his efforts, so far as his paper was concerned, had come to nothing. The subtleties of his people he had written of with subtlety that could not be understood. In the background of his intention there had always been a loyalty which his own people were unable to sift from the spirited and dynamic articles in his paper about them. They had their ideas of justice which were the same as his, basically, but his were involved in the processes of seeking beauty and metaphors and symbols and images. Four years at Baltimore studying had given him a taste for those things. His people, the people of his hills, could not see that what he meant and what they felt were the same. He wanted to be understood, and felt that maybe since an editor had understood him, others might. What he wanted from the Farrels was something to explain to the outside world why two hillmen made an annihilating wheel of knives around an enemy instead of humanely shooting him.

Then Rackteen, knowing that the boys, Moses and Jonah, would say nothing without the consent of their pappy, leaned over toward the breathings and whispered:

"Noah, listen. Listen, Noah, to me. I was leaning out my window and I heard a yell. I saw men freeze on the street. When I went over I expected to see a fight where the yell came from, in the restaurant. But I saw Keir Meadowes on the floor, mowed down by a wheel of knives, cut off the earth by Moses and Jonah. They made a posse, the sheriff and them; forty men threw a cordon,

forty men are stretching a wall around these hills. I joined the posse. Of course I joined it. I can't take your boys but I would if I could, if I wasn't powerless in this cave."

Rackteen paused. He heard the breathings merge, then separate again. He expected silence until he had said all he wanted to say. He feared nothing because face to face a hillman will submit to being criticized, even condemned by a friend. And he knew that a hillman never breaks in, never answers until sure the other is through talking, nor until the answer is shaped in his mind and all angles of his speech measured.

"Keir did something to you boys to get cut up thataway," said Rackteen. "What did Keir do?"

Prepared to wait through another period of silence, Rackteen, looking ahead, saw the slight fading of a shadow where the light entering feebly at the entrance threw itself more feebly against the cave wall at the turn. He faintly heard the mules shift their feet now and then. He strained his ears for a sound from outside. Only the breathings came.

After a while a whisper reached his ears.

"What air the why-for you-un want ter know?"

"Because it bothers me," Rackteen whispered back. "It makes me sick not to know."

Under the pall a sign was passed. Under the pall a command was given. Rackteen felt the air about him stir, felt the close proximity of one of the three.

"We-uns had to snuff Keir out," said a whisper.

"Who's talking?" asked Rackteen.

"Jonah. Jonah's a-tellin' you-un."

"Hit war fitten 'at Keir pay." Noah, the boy's pappy, said it.

"Huh. Why didn't you shoot him, or turn a wild hog on him?" said Rackteen. "Why'd you butcher him?"

"We-uns knowed 'at—"

"*S-s-h!*" cut in Jonah on his brother Moses. "This-un 'll do the talkin', now an' at cote-trial.

"Three travelers come ter we-uns home las' week. Three travelers come in a tempest-storm. Said they war a-lookin' at coal lands an' white oak timber an' oil. Said they war a-goin' pay mountain folks big money fer fire-coal rights an' sech. Wal, we-uns gave 'em victuals. Gave 'em beds an' laid our bodies down on the floor. Old wind a-howlin'. Rain a-batterin' an' cold.

" 'At night late one o' the travelers begin ter groan an' carry on. I heerd a voice say, 'I'm a-dyin' with belly-cramps. Hit must have been the cucumber I ate, must have been kase I ate a cucumber and walked most of the day through hot sun.'

"Another voice said, 'Hain't yer got ary thing fer my friend's belly-cramps?'

"My pap an' me an' Moses an' maw got our heads together in the shadders. Only thing o' course is likker fer cramps. But we suspicioned the travelers. Hit war a fac' they-uns knowed 'bout fire-coal an' white oak timber an' oil. Hit war a fact they-uns war up an' down our branch a-fixin' up lease-signin's. Hit war a fact 'at the travelers showed we-uns money they war itchin' ter pay we-uns fer our fire-coal hole on the big mountain. But jes' the same we suspicioned 'em an' tole 'em we hadn't ary thing fer belly cramps.

"Then the sick man got worse. Fell on the floor. An' when we-uns lighted the fat-pine we seed him a-rollin' an' a-tossin', an heerd him a-yellin', an' the other travelers a-tryin' ter git him inter bed ag'in; a-tryin' ter rub the horrible knots outen his belly.

"Wal, hit's hard ter see a dog suffer thataway. Arter while my maw says in a whisper, 'We-uns cain't let a man die, cain't let a man's innards bile. An' we-uns hain't sartin-shore the travelers air Gov'ments.' An' my maw began ter quote scripture.

"Arter awhile my pap went out, went clar up the mountain an' back and fotched some corn likker from our cache near the still. The sick man drank. Belly-cramps stopped, an' purty quick the three travelers war asleep an' a-snorin'.

Water from the tempest a-runnin' off my pappy kase he played Samaritan to the travelers when my maw quoted Good Book an' begged.

"'Then afore sunup, electric flashin' our eyes, the three travelers covered we-uns with pistol-guns, big Colt guns. The sick man a-holdin' the jug o' likker, hangin' on ter the evidence my pappy fotched hisself through the tempest-storm. Nary a chance at our rifle-guns on the wall. They-uns marched we-uns ter Leeston an' warranted us."

"Huh," said Rackteen, "how'd you get bail—all of you?"

"When Lawyer Carr heerd our side he got busy. Reckon everybody in town come across with our bail. 'Only way them Gov'ment men kin convict you-uns, only way ter penitentary you-uns,' says Lawyer Carr, 'air ter try you-uns in the lowlands whar hospitality air a mockery an' whar guest turns agin host.' "

WAY down, Rackteen boiled. The infamous business of men working into the graces of hill-men, accepting their food, taking their beds away from them and then striking like a highland moccasin snake, brought waves of heat to Rackteen's head. He saw a tipping of scales. He saw caricatured justice. With his mind's eyes he saw a sorry sight: wolves in sheeps' clothing.

"They ought to be lynched," he told himself. "They ought to be—" He started to whisper to the three Farrels.

"One thing bothered we-uns right smart," went on Jonah. "One thing puzzlemented we-uns. Why you reckon Gov'ment men pounced daown on we-uns an'—an' not on ary other blockader along this branch? Hit looked like they-uns fixed up lease-signin's with other folks jes' so they-uns could fool we-uns. We-uns sot daown hard on this puzzlement, a-waitin' an' a-thinkin' an' a-sottin' fer a week. Then this mawnin' Moses an' me muled hit ter Leeston fer a leetle white flour an' sech. An' we sot aroun' the gen'al store. I got ter studyin' an' listenin' an' a-lookin'. Thar hain't ary se-cret in the world 'at won't crap out effen you give hit time. Arter awhile I seed a feller war a-studyin' me. One o' the Maude men from Meddlesome, some way cousins ter we-uns. Sometimes he-un scratched his head. Sometimes he-un took a step in our direction and then stop ag'in, an' pull at his chin. Arter awhile he got close, a leetle at a time, an' arter while he stooped over ter pick a dried apple outen a box near we-uns feet. He war a right smart long in holpin' hisself an' while he-un fingered aroun' in the box he whispered—

" 'Air you-uns puzzlemented kase Gov'-ment men raided you-uns?' he said soft-like, jes' loud enough to reach Moses and me a-sittin' by.

" 'Wal,' this-un says, 'we-uns air goda-mighty dumb an' hellamighty curious, fer a fact.'

" 'Huh,' Jake Maude says, 'you-uns hain't thought on Keir Meadowes, air yuh?'

" 'We-uns hain't particu'lized he-un,' this-un say.

" 'Wal,' says Jake Maude, 'hit hain't a-hurtin' none ter do hit.'

" 'You-un a-guessin' Keir informed on we-uns?'

"When I axed him that he gave this-un a hard look an' said, with his mouth up close as he fingered dried apples, 'My boy Pliny seed Federal men a-comin' daown crick 'bout a week ago and hid his hide in bushes. When the Federal men passed he heerd 'em a-talkin'. Hit war jes' afore the tempest-storm broke. Heerd one o' 'em say that ef the Meadowes boy war right an' tipped 'em off squar', why, they-uns would shore make a showin' in arrestin' the biggest blockader in the county an' they-uns would make Wash-in'ton sit up an' notice.'

" 'I reckon your boy Pliny told hit ter you-un straight,' this-un said.

" 'We-uns air kin, hain't we?' said Jake Maude. 'An' hit bein' the fact an' the case, you-un mought as well ax your maw or your pappy ef they-uns tol' the straight.' "

For a period the silence filled in again. Rackteen heard the three hillmen hold their breaths for half a minute while they listened. The mules still shifted their feet.

"Arter Jake Maude picked hisself out another piece o' dried apple he strolled off down-street. Me an' Moses sot fer a bit longer. Then we git up an' go outside. We-uns didn't say a word ter anybody but jes' kep' our eyes open an' our mouths shut. Arter while a-passin' restaurant we seed Keir a-eatin'. An' we-uns went in.

"We-uns believed Jake Maude o' course. We-uns knew he wanted ter pay off Keir fer somethin' his folks did ter the Maudes, but we knowed Jake an' his boy wouldn't lie ter do hit. Maudes don' lie. Jes' the same we-uns reckoned ter go a leetle bit slow. Effen Keir air guilty hit's shore ter crap out.

"Wal, Keir war a-eatin' an' some other fellers stood around a-gassin' 'bout religion an' sech. We-uns took out our knives an' began a-whittlin' on matches. Purty soon I said ter Turk O'Gowd who runs the restaurant, 'Turk, yer hain't seed ary informer 'bout hyar, air yuh?'

"The other fellers didn't bat an eye, but Keir—Keir turned a face on we-uns the color of ashes an' his body shook an' jumped like a tulip tree in a tempest. His mouth war open an' his eyes big an' guilty. Guilt war oozin' out all over him. Thar's two kinds o' fear in every man; the honest healthy fear when he faces a bar without a weepon, an' thar's the fear 'at comes from a feller when he knows his sin's found him out. Effen the law cain't reach a man, nature shore will; an' Keir Meadowes jes' couldn't holp a-lettin' his eyes say, 'This-un air the informer.'

"Moses an' me had hit in mind ter beat him up. But hit's funny what a man'll do when he air loco an' mad. This-un thought on gwine ter prison kase o' Keir, an' thought o' my maw left alone with the craps, an' I got mad same as a wild boar-hog."

When the whispering stopped, Rackteen made his mind picture of scales again. They seemed balanced to him but he knew they could not stay that way in his hills. There were no two deeds good or bad that were alike in weight. The Farrel men would go to prison. The scales would tip. He wondered why Keir informed.

"Why you reckon Keir informed on you?" asked Rackteen.

"Effen the Federals lawed we-uns ter the penitent'ry Keir kin do more blockadin'. Our pure likker war a-hurtin' his pizen trade."

"Well," said Rackteen, "maybe there was something else, too. Maybe something you don't know about."

But Jonah did not answer. He was through. The breathings came again, the mules shifted their feet. Fifteen minutes passed. A half hour. Then it seemed to Rackteen he heard from the direction of the entrance a new sound, a heavy footfall as if somebody had leaped and landed heavily. A mule squealed. A heavy thud came as from a body thrown to earth. He told himself that one of the posse must have entered the cave for a search, or, driven in by the wild hog, had touched the man killing mule.

There was absolute silence after that, and Rackteen missed the breathings. He waited for a full minute, thinking maybe the Farrels were holding their breaths to listen the better. Then he called in a whisper—

"Noah. Jonah."

NO ANSWER. No breathings. He reached out with his hands and felt nothing but a cold draft of air. With hands outstretched he moved slowly ahead and pretty soon touched a wall, a wall he thought ran at right angles to the one he had been leaning against. He thought the blackness faded a little beyond him and slowly followed the wall. Underfoot the earth became wet, slimy and slippery. He heard water dripping. Soon he felt the wall curve and the light ahead, though dim, promised an exit.

"The Farrels have another way out," he told himself and continued on.

At last he stopped where the light seemed to descend from above. He looked up and saw a sky cut by a filigree of foliage. Laurel and greenbrier laced tight together formed a canopy so thick that the light sifting through was not enough for him to see the way out. So he felt around with his hands and found a projecting rock, and with his left hand against the opposite wall managed to get his foot up on the rock. He now felt the edge of a ledge and, firmly holding on, swung upward. Clear of the cavern, but he swung over into the thicket of the laurel and thorns.

He heard hogs grunting and blowing in the beech woods beyond the laurel hell as he made his way out. Scratched and torn, he stood in the open at last, letting his eyes roam and his ears listen.

A roar suddenly shook the woods, roar of an old black powder gun, followed by the crack of a Mauser. A movement flicked the corner of Rackteen's eye and, whirling, he saw a hillman, one of the posse, embracing a tree with one arm and slowly sinking to the ground. He sprawled and lay there bleeding. Rackteen saw other forms dodging from tree to tree, a wing of the posse spreading, making another attempt at a cordon. From some distance three Mausers cracked and another one of the posse clutched his tree only to pivot around it, slowly let go his embrace and fall heavily.

A dozen or more rifles spoke, then Rackteen could see the possemen lower their rifles and stand motionless behind their trees. The Mausers did not answer. The posse seemed satisfied to grow to the trees, so long did they stand immovable.

Rackteen had a hunch that the Farrel men escaped this part of the posse only to be trapped by another wing. Ten to one, he reasoned, the circle was finished and tight and the fugitives were in the center of it.

He advanced, not knowing why, until he stood by the side of a hillman sheltered by a big tulip tree. The whole detachment of hillmen stared at him; their faces wore the expression of censure and unbelief. He felt awkward. Bleeding from scratches inflicted by the greenbrier and minus his rifle, without any weapon whatever, he felt suddenly that he was the ineffective, useless part of the man hunt. The way he stood there, exposed to chance as well as any hostile bullets, was puzzling to the hillmen. Two thoughts flashed across his mind: to the posse he must seem to have had some other business besides hunting the Farrels, and he must seem to feel sure the Farrels would not pop him off. He acted awfully careless with his body.

"They took my gun," said Rackteen, so that all might hear. "Trapped me in a cave and took my gun."

Rackteen found himself counting the men, ten of them, and he separated them in his mind. Three first cousins, two second cousins, and an uncle of Keir Meadowes. Only four of the ten were not related to the murdered man. All Shakespeares, and the toughest and rawest of the clan. Rackteen recalled a two year old difficulty between the Farrels and Shakespeares. A little bit too mild a trouble to set either of the clans hunting each other; a half fancied wrong somewhere that just smoldered for two years, needing a little more winds of circumstance to fan it to flame. One of the embers of bitterness that will burn for generations, weakly but never quenched.

"You-un hain't scairt a-gittin' snuffed out by Mauser-guns o' the Farrel men," said a hillman, uncle to Keir Meadowes. "You-un better git yourself up a tree."

"Where'd they go? Those Farrels?" said Rackteen.

"Yander," said another hillman, pointing toward the densest part of the woods.

"Where's Keir's pappy, and brothers and cousins?" asked Rackteen.

"Other side the cove," said the uncle of Keir Meadowes. "A-headin' off they-uns."

"Huh," said Rackteen. Then he told himself that the Shakespeares meant to get the Farrels. Two-thirds of the posse were the Shakespeares.

" 'At Mauser-gun's a-goin' ter git you-un effen you hain't keerful." A Meadowes said it, first cousin to the dead Keir.

"Hell with the Mauser. I'm afraid of something else—something worse than a gun."

Rackteen *was* afraid of something. He trembled a little and his face went pale. Suddenly he started for the cove beyond the thick clump of beeches and the hillmen looked back. Seemed as if Rackteen were running away from trouble, but in reality he was running into it. A dozen rifles spoke from the woods beyond, then quiet again. Rackteen increased his pace to a run, bumping into saplings and stumbling over the thick undergrowth. The other side the woods he stopped suddenly on the rim of a cove and looked down.

The cove covered with laurel and laced together with greenbrier was quiet for the minute. He could see some of the smoke hanging in the still air from the last volley of gun fire. To his left and to his right he saw, lying flat on their bellies around the rim of the cove, the scattered forms of six or eight hillmen, ready with their guns and watching the laurel hell below them intently. He saw the muzzle of a rifle move in the bushes directly across from him and knew there were others there at the entrance to the cove, where a gap also showed him the waters of the branch. Then he heard a rustle back of him and, wheeling, saw a hillman in the bushes with a long hog rifle.

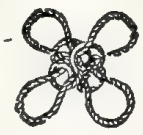
"You-un air shore invitin' them Farrels ter pop yer off," said the hillman, in a whisper. "What air the why-for you-un cain't take scripture's word fer hellfire? You air the investigatenest feller I ever seed."

Turning around and looking again down into the laurel hell, Rackteen saw a hat rise a little. Immediately there were rifle shots from everywhere except back of him.

"They-uns hain't a-foolin' this-un with thar hat tricks," said the man with the hog rifle, and broke himself off a chew of twist tobacco.

Rackteen wondered where Jett, the sheriff, was, and was filled with a new alarm. They needed a sheriff now if they ever needed one in the county. Somehow, Rackteen was possessed of a plan the phases of which came to him one at a time. He quite deliberately lowered his body down the side of the cove and when he touched the bowl-like depression in the earth he stood in laurel up to his chest. He held his hands high in the air and shouted so that all might hear—

"Listen, and I'll tell you why—"



FROM the laurel on his right came crashings, several shots, oaths and the sickening sound of bone against bone. Rackteen saw a mass of twisting, gouging men, suddenly appearing from the cover of laurel. He saw them struggling in the small clearing by the branch. Two hillmen were carrying the unconscious Moses Farrel, and six others were jerking forward Jonah and his pappy. Rackteen sickened at the way the mass was moving toward a big sycamore; the captors of the Farrels keeping their eyes on the tree, the goal of a dreadful game. And Rackteen, tearing through the brush, found himself with the mob, shouting something, something that sounded like nonsense to him.

"You can't do that! You can't do that!" he yelled; and under the sycamore he felt the light touch of something—something that lay across his shoulder.

He looked up then and saw a hillman sitting like a cat on a stout limb fixing a rope, while the Farrels, held by three times their number, looked on stoically. And Rackteen, looking around at all the determined set faces, finally rested his stare on Mark Meadowes, pappy of the dead Keir. He was groping for something to loosen up the rigidity of the mob. He gained a respite by audacity. Holding up his hand to the man perched in the limb of the sycamore, he said:

"Wait a minute. Wait just a minute."

With a hand clutching the dangling rope, his other clutched Mark Meadowes by the sleeve—Mark, the pappy of the

dead Keir and of the other two boys, Ked and Blain Meadowes; old patriarch, old leader of men in the Meddlesome country. The right hand of Rackteen pulled Mark aside by his coat sleeve and his left grasped the rope. He stopped only when he felt the end of the rope. Holding it taut, he spoke to Mark, looked into hard eyes and said:

"Three travelers came to the house of the Farrels in a storm. They played sick, one of them did, and got Noah to git some likker for a belly-cramp. Then the three travelers, the wolves in the clothing of lambs, took the Farrels to jail and warranted them. But the travelers went looking for the Farrels in a storm because—because Keir informed."

"Who war a-sayin' Keir informed?" said Mark.

"Who? The travelers, the Government men themselves."

"Who heerd Gov'ment men say hit?"

"Who?" said Rackteen, and for a few seconds he faced a wall.

If he said Jake Maude's boy overheard the Federals, old Mark might not believe because of trouble between the two families, and he, Rackteen, might be fanning another flame. There was that obsession of his always growing stronger, those scales that he saw tipping again. He knew that the twisting, impatient men holding the three fugitives were waiting—waiting for a sign from the patriarch.

"I heard 'em," said Rackteen, and he added, "If a man informed on *you*—*you'd* kill him."

The patriarch scratched his chin, looked once more into the face of Rackteen, and made gestures, slow, scooping gestures that seemed to gather in his kin. The hillman came down from the tree. The six that held the Farrels released their holds.

Winded, the sheriff and several more of the posse crashed through the bushes and attached themselves to the scene.

The county officer saw Moses Farrel on the ground, wounded and bleeding.

"Take him home and fix him up. And then come and give yourself up," he said to Jonah. "I want to lock you up before sundown. You coming?"

"A-comin'," said Jonah, "afore sundown."

Rackteen walked off, down the creek bed road, deaf to the voice of the sheriff who called. Around a bend in the branch he sat by the slow moving waters; took a note book and pencil from his pocket.

"Here's life in the raw," he said to himself. "Here is drama. Here is news. They ought to sit up and take notice of this. It ought to be written when it's hot."

His pencil worked feverishly. Sheet after sheet was filled. Pretty soon he read what he had written. The writing was good, he thought, brief, with the sharp effects demanded by the press. A bit of mountain correspondence that ought to make him solid with the Northern paper.

But he saw a world aghast over the complexes of his people; a strange evolution of images made his people seem to stand out naked on his written sheets. Keir Meadowes betraying a mountain neighbor to three outsiders, three Federal men. The Federal men tricking the Farrels. Jake Maude whispering to the Farrels in the general store, repeating what his boy heard so that a private wrong would be avenged. The wheel of knives that mowed down Keir. The mob that was set on defying the law. He, Rackteen, was telling all these things about his hills to the world. He was an informer.

Abruptly, he tore the leaves from his note book into fine pieces. Dropping them, he watched the slow moving waters of the branch carry them on. He watched the waters slowly separate the pieces, leaving a few to lodge, fluttering, against a boulder here and there. The rest floated on farther and were left where the mountain branch passed under overhanging shrubbery and chose to leave them.

The Best Man

By R. E. ALEXANDER

AYE, man, it was done for Polly, the bailiff's lass.
She said:
"The best man in all England—him or none will I wed!"
And never a plumper or prettier lass a man's eyes fed.

And I wasn't "The Game Chicken" yet—only Jem Pearce's Hen'.
A good lad and a willin' one with the maulies, I was then.
And his Lordship's eye on Polly, and her cap set for all men.

So be I went off in the mornin' with little enough in my pack;
With the old man's curses in my ears, till his mouth went slack.
I'd be best man in all England, I vowed, ere I came back.

It was Jack Broughton found and trained me—the top-cock o' the ring:
He took Mendoza the Jew by the hair and he fair made him sing!
And Tom Cribb, and Jem Belcher, they took me under their wing.

I downed the pick o' the Fancy—Gamble and Spring and Burn.
The Bantry Boy and his green garters, I done him to a turn,
With Jem Figg, himself, lookin' on, and he said I'd little to learn.

There was nowt left but Ned Griff to stand up before me.
A black Welshman o' sixteen stone and four cubits was he.
We were matched to meet of a Monday morn on Mousehole Heath by the sea

Twenty-four foot o' good fightin' grass, with ropes and stakes is a ring;
And I'd rather be cock o' such a walk than His Majesty the King!
And so would say all o' the millin' coves an they said anything.

A half-score thousand was there to see the flash coves and the mob,
The Duke o' Kells, Lord This, Sir That, Tom, Dick, Harry and Hob.
I sat on the Fightin' Tinker's knee; Griff's second was Jerry Cobb.

Bright gold were my garters and fogle, the kerchief flamin' new.
The half o' the Fancy showed yellow; half flaunted bird's-eye blue;
Griff's colors, his fightin' fogle and peacock's tail, too!

Griff led off with a fair nobbler I wasn't minded to catch;
It sizzled past one ear so fast it nigh lifted my thatch!
I tapped Griff's smeller for claret—I got it. First blood of the match.

We're at grips, fast-locked together. *Thud! thud! thwack!*
Griff's fibbin' away at my short ribs. I'm handin' it all back.
And, damme, he cross-heels me—down I go like a sack!

Up! *Wham!* in his box o' dominoes I land one o' my best.
He spat and grinned like a jack badger, came back for the rest.
My cross-buttock's the best throw ever seen in the West!

In the fortieth round he tried to butt; in the fiftieth he bit
My thumb to the bone. But I said nowt. I hit! *hit*! HIT!
With all the young coveys screamin' like loons I stepped in to finish it.

But he wasn't done. He charged like a bull, he pinned me fast to a stake.
Hands at my throat, he coiled about me; he seemed to hiss like a snake.
A whistle blew; the plash of water in my face jarred me awake.

Then the seventy-fifth. I cornered him fair—fairly I beat him down.
Down . . . Up! Down . . . Up! I'd buy Polly a silken gown.
In a red mist I gripped Griff fast—clutched at his champion's crown.

I held him up with the right hand, struck with the left. He fell.
I was best man in all England as I staggered off to tell
Polly—gone with his Lordship to London-town, and hell.

THIEVES' PARADISE

By

HUGH PENDEXTER

CHAPTER I

THE TOWN CALLED KIT CARSON

THE DENVER bound freight on the Kansas and Pacific kicked off several freight cars at the foot of the heavy grade where the Arkansas valley branch left the main stem and proceeded on its way to Denver, a hundred and fifty miles away. An unsuspected passenger in a horse car was awakened by the silence. For weary miles his ears had been accustomed to the pounding of the wheels. The stillness aroused him.

It was the gray of early morning. He slipped from the narrow shelf that served for the hostler's bed and dressed by the simple process of donning hat and coat and slipping two .44 six-shooters into the holsters of a shoulder harness. The guns were his tools, his means of earning a livelihood. In his pocket were six silver dollars.

As he stared out through the square hole high up at the end of the car he was vastly puzzled. A long grade stretched westward and upward toward a bulwark of mighty mountains. The tops of these heights were rosy with the light of the still invisible sun. The train was surmounting this rise. To the east, north and south extended the rolling plains country. It was a most distressing discovery. He should be viewing the trainyard in Denver. Instead, he was marooned.

A Novelette of a Wide Open Town in Early Colorado

Further reconnoitering revealed a straggling line of houses south of the track. One building dominated the others by its bulk. Not until the red rim of the sun pierced the mists in the east could he make an intelligent survey of the little settlement.

He was bewildered and worried. If he reached Denver on the scheduled date his guns would procure him a livelihood. Disappointment, emptiness and the drab houses made him feel off balance. Had he had a home any time during the last few years he might have diagnosed his sensation as homesickness.

His wits quickened and became objective as he beheld several men briskly approaching. His first thought was that they were coming to arrest him. Common sense told him they could not suspect his presence. They were laughing and jesting, and that was no technique to practise in capturing a railroad tramp. And there was nothing mysterious about the cars being left at the foot of the grade, had he but known it. It was often done when the train was unusually long and heavy. The next freight through would couple on and haul the cars to Denver.

"Ehls surely tipped us off right," cried one of the group. "Scanny will git his hosses."

"What about the hostler?" asked another.

"He quit the job at Fort Wallace. That gives us our chance. Car must have been

broken into there while waiting on the siding."

"There's other pickin's besides hosses," spoke up a fat man with a rolling gait. "You boys will prosper as well as me. This steep grade is a godsend for us. But I must have stuff for the hotel. The hosses I use will fetch a profit home to all of you."

"We ain't kicking s'long as we have free run at your place," said a third man in a rumbling bass. "But you won't take all the critters?"

"I'd love to, Sharp, if they be as good as Ehls represented," admitted Scanny. Then with a sigh, "However, we don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs."

"I wish Ehls would spot some cars with gents' clothes and some fancy things for the women folks," complained the fourth man. "An' ain't we gittin' low on terbaccer?"

"Being railway watchman, Williams, you might write in to the head of the road and tell him what we need," suggested Sharp. "And ask him to please put in some candy." This bit of banter was rewarded with loud laughter.

The four men made for the big sliding doors in a most confident and business-like manner. The young man, perched up at the opening at the rear of the car, was much puzzled by this talk. These newcomers could not be railroad men. Yet they moved as if they had authority. Whistling a lively tune, one of them tampered with the fastenings. James slipped through the opening and eased himself down the ladder and worked to the north side of the car. The increased light confirmed what he already knew. The cars were marked for Denver. But how could railroad thieves work so openly? A woman emerged from the nearest house and called shrilly:

"Fetch me some sort of a bunnit. A shawl, if you find one."

"Bring up the runway," bawled Scanny, the fat man. "We'll pick three of the best, and we ain't got much time to lose. My wagon's waiting. We'll hitch them in and start them south with the stuff for the San Juan country. I'll have my man sell them down there. And we've got to git rid of the rest of the stuff we've buried. Got to sell it quick. Hard money's what we need. Williams, do a neat job so it won't show."

"Reckon I know how to open a car," grunted Williams, the railroad watchman.

Scanny appeared to be the leader, as he gave the orders but offered no assistance. His three companions ran to a nearby shed and quickly returned, dragging long cleated planks. This was evidence that other livestock had been unloaded at Kit Carson. The young man seized this opportunity to slip to the ground and into the ditch. Bending low, he hurried east for a fourth of a mile. Then he ventured to spy on the unusual scene. He was in time to see three heavy wagons traveling south. There were no men near the cars.

"Well, if that isn't the queerest thing I ever saw, my name isn't Benny James," he soliloquized as he climbed up the bank and started toward the cars.

As he got abreast of the cars he saw that the doors were closed. Nor was there any sign of the heavy planks having been used for removing the horses. The leaded seals were intact. He was curiously studying the line of houses when he was startled by a man springing from behind the third car, crying—

"Who'n hell might you be, mister?"

"Tramp," answered James. "And who are you?"

"None of your damned business! I'm Constable Sharp. You understand that? Then keep it hot in your mind."

"Certainly. You're Constable Sharp."

"I'm waiting for your name. Where you come from? Where you going? What's your business? What you hanging round these freight cars for?"

"My name is Ben James. Some folks think I'm a relation of Jesse's. I come from the East and am chasing the sunset. I'm not hanging around these cars; simply passing them. Are you a railroad constable, or a town constable?"

"Railroads don't have constables. What you going to do when you hit Denver?"

"I don't know. I have six dollars in my pocket. I may go into business."

"Fork over them dollars, or go before Peace Justice Scanny, who'll fine you ten and send you to jail."

"I hadn't finished telling about my property," said James quietly. "I also have two .44's. Prime six-guns. When I have a job I do trick shooting in a circus. Joining Cole's Circus if I can catch up with it. Do you hanker for my money?" And he folded his arms with his hands thrust inside his coat.

SHARP eyed him dubiously and finally decided:

"If you're hunting honest work I'll let you go. But no tramps can loaf around this town. If Williams, the watchman, was standing in my leather he'd have you knuckling under, guns or no guns."

"He'd have to be awful good," confided James. "Is that big building a place where I can get breakfast?"

"Sure, you can git breakfast if you ain't lying about the money," replied Sharp. "I never go to be hard on a man who's just down on his luck. So you do tricks with guns, huh?"

"I can shoot a trifle. Put some pebbles in your hat and scale it down the track out of range of the house. I'll show you a trick. That is, I think I can."

Sharp, curious to observe what the stranger could do, removed his soft hat and weighted it with a handful of pebbles and suddenly scaled it toward the rising sun. A gun was exploding in the stranger's hand without the constable's seeing when it was drawn or where it came from. Three shots came so rapidly that Sharp was not sure whether the man had fired twice or thrice. He saw his hat give a convulsive jump, as if alive. He ran down the track and voiced a yell of rage as he picked up his headgear. James waited and reloaded his gun. The constable returned on the run, his hat on his head and minus most of the top.

"See what you done! You've sp'iled it! Sp'iled a prime ten-dollar hat!"

"You were willing for me to try," soothed James. "It would cost you fifty cents to see me do as good a trick as that in the circus. And you can get a new hat from the railroad, can't you?"

Sharp's rage vanished. He glared at James suspiciously and, in a low voice, asked:

"Now just what do you mean by that? How can I get a new hat from the Kansas Pacific?"

"Don't you do any work for them?" James asked innocently.

"I've told you once I'm town constable of Kit Carson. Fram Williams is the railroad watchman."

"But you protect their property when he isn't on duty."

Sharp's suspicion faded.

"That's so," he admitted. "Well, my good hat's shot to hell and here come the boys on the jump, excited by your fancy shooting. If I don't smooth things down they'll treat you rough."

"Show them your hat," suggested James. "I think I'll go and meet them. If you're a peace officer, you see that you keep the peace. I can hit a sparrow in the right eye at one hundred measured yards."

He turned and walked boldly toward the several men, now hurrying forth to investigate the shooting. Back of the men were several women and half a dozen children.

The man in the lead wore a gun on each hip. His eyes were heavy lidded, giving him a sleepy appearance. He was very direct in his deportment, however. On coming close to James he halted and said—

"You're arrested for disturbing the peace."

James teetered back and forth and explained:

"Your constable, Mr. Sharp, asked me to show him some good shooting. If I disturbed the peace he aided and abetted me."

"He's a trick pistol shot, Fram. I

didn't believe he could do it, but look at my hat."

Williams stared at the frowsy hair, showing through the hat, and then turned his gaze on the young fellow. James' blue eyes were clear and unafraid.

The watchman gruffly conceded:

"If that's the way it happened I'll overlook it this time. But we're a peaceful people here. We don't want no gun firing."

"There will be no more from me. I want some breakfast."

"Paying guests are always welcome," quickly spoke up Scanny. "Fifty cents for as prime a breakfast as ever you stuck a tooth into."

"He's got six dollars," informed Sharp. "Don't worry but what he can pay."

"The price to a stranger is a dollar'n' half," added Scanny.

James halted. It was more the insolent avarice of the man than the shift in prices that decided him to go hungry a little longer.

"I'm not so nippish as I thought I was," he announced. "I'll be traveling west again."

"Hold on there!" called a shrill voice from the rear of the group. "Can you work? Real, helpful work, like herding sheep, herding cattle, ride a hoss?"

"I love work."

"Then you trail along with me. My name's Freedom. Loyal Freedom. Pap and me need a man most mortal. Wearing guns won't hurt you any with pap."

"Where's your place?" asked James.

This fellow was young and seemed to be different from the others.

"Five miles from here. Promise to stick a week and I'll buy your breakfast and pay good wages. I've just pulled in and am keen to eat."

"I won't let any man be bamboozled out of even a dollar along of me being hungry," firmly answered James.

"Hell! Don't be afraid that any of this bunch will shake any extry money out of my jeans. I'm too wise."

Lowering glances were directed at the free speaking youth. Then, by some telepathy, a genial, good natured smile passed across the vicious faces of the citizens. Scanny clapped the youth on the shoulder and said:

"Ain't that just like a Freedom! His pap all over! No, sirree, Loyal Freedom, I shan't boost prices to you, nor to your pretty sister."

"Never mind my sister. She eats at home."

There was a snarl in his voice, and James, appraising him more carefully, decided he was one who could be influenced into reckless ways if the right kind of an incentive were furnished. But he liked him at sight.

"I'll be glad to eat with you, Freedom, and I'll pay my own shot. The going price. I'll put in a week and see how I like it, as I'm already too late to catch up with the circus."

"Je'crimity! Belong to a circus? A real circus?" And the dark eyes were as round and curious as a child's. "Say, do me some tricks, will you? When we git back to the ranch-house?"

James laughed but made no promises.

Scanny spoke aside to Constable Sharp, who hurriedly went ahead of the others. As he advanced he spoke from the corner of his mouth and the curiosity of the townspeople seemed to vanish. Women hastened back to their domestic duties. Men showed no more interest in the stranger and Old Man Freedom's son.

The young men were sizing up each other as they conversed in broken sentences. James found his liking for young Freedom increasing. The latter was boyishly interested in the stranger.

"Here's the hotel," he announced as he halted before the large weather beaten structure.

To the right of the door was a half effaced sign, reading "Justice of the Peace."

"Then they do have justice here," observed James.

"Scanny is the peace justice. Not much for him to do, as there's only some twenty-five folks live here. His teamsters and herders blow in on their time off and

raise Cain. But we mustn't talk about that until we're out in the open."

Scanny appeared at the window, the defective glass distorting his fat face into a leering mask. Freedom nudged his companion to be cautious and led the way inside. The office and barroom were one and extended the width of the building, affording ample room for many loungers. A dozen citizens were there, having entered by a side door. None were planning to go to work. In fact, James had seen no evidence of labor except the looting of the car. Young Freedom led the way to another room where a table was laid with excellent linen and silver. The two had the room to themselves.

"Doesn't any one work in this town?" asked James.

Freedom signaled for him to be careful and glanced significantly at a woman passing through the room. Her appearance was startling. The thin face was ghastly white, the eyes deep set and smoldering. There was a peculiar rigidity in her bearing, suggestive of an automaton.

"Who is she?" whispered James. "Scanny's wife?"

"He hasn't any wife. She's a mystery woman. Comes and stays awhile and goes south. She seldom speaks, from what I've noticed, but the whole outfit seems to be afraid of her."

"A gaunt and rather ghastly figure. So terribly thin."

"The men here seem to be afraid of her," added James. "And here's our breakfast."

A SLATTERNLY woman unloaded an excellent breakfast from the huge tray, and James was happily surprised as he noted the variety of the food. Having served them, the waitress withdrew. Freedom warned:

"Don't open your yawp in this burg except to talk about the weather. I'll explain as we travel. Pap has his cattle some eight miles out. And nearly a thousand sheep in a fold of the foothills. That is, he had them when I pulled out before daybreak. Our Mexican sheepherder quit us. Dusted without bothering to collect his pay. Must have been scared off. Pap and Liberty are riding herd on the cattle and the dogs are taking care of the sheep. Pap won't let her be alone with either. That's why I'm here. To get a man if I can."

"Your name's Loyal Freedom and you speak of a young woman named Liberty. Sounds like Fourth of July."

Young Freedom grinned and explained:

"Liberty is my sister. Called Lib for short. Pap's name is National Freedom. Don't that beat the Dutch? Still, we Freedoms take a sneaking pride in our handles. No trash in the breed unless it's way back. Pap was shot up some during the fuss with the Rebs. He was named after his pap, who was killed in the Mexican War. I was named after a Freedom who was rubbed out in the Revolutionary War. Highfalutin names, but we seem to run to them."

"I think they're bully," said James. "Now tell me what sort of a place—"

Freedom's elbow silenced him. The tall emaciated woman with the masklike face passed through the room, staring straight ahead like a sleep-walker.

"Dawgone! But she gives me the creeps," whispered Freedom. "We mustn't talk about this place, or the people. But you can tell me how you dropped into this town."

"Let's wait till we're in the open. That reminds me: Will I need a horse?"

"Not with the sheep. We've got hosses enough. That is, we had when I quit home this morning. It's only five miles. We'll take turns riding. We won't buy no animals here in Carson. Darned shame that the name of such a great man should be tacked on to this measly little burg."

"She comes!"

But this time the mystery woman did not enter the room. She stood for a moment in the doorway of the cook room, her gaze fixed on the two diners. As they glanced at her she withdrew.

With an eye for detail James took note of the expensive earrings the waitress was wearing. The girl's footgear was also out of keeping with the time and place. Instead of stout shoes she wore slippers of satin with brilliants studding the buckles. A closer inventory brought rings and a stickpin to his notice. After the girl had left the room James whispered:

"See all that finery? And so out of place? I'll bet I have the answer."

"If you don't want your throat cut keep shut till we can see three miles of open country in every direction," warned his companion. "Let's go."

"I feel as if I was being watched by a dozen pair of eyes," James whispered as they walked to the office.

"We're watched all the time."

The proprietor bustled forward and cordially urged:

"Have a snort of good liquor, boys. My treat. I have some of the best to be found in all the West." And he pointed proudly to the long bar, behind which were barrels and many bottles.

"Thanks," said young Freedom. "I don't drink."

"And I never do so early in the morning," added James.

They were making for the door when Fram Williams, the railroad watchman, lifted his thick body from a plush upholstered chair and blocked their path. His eyes were all but closed, the lids much swollen.

"Just a minute," he said huskily. "I don't want to stop you folks from gitting help, Freedom, but I must ask this feller where he comes from."

"Pennsylvania," said James.

"How did you git here to Kit Carson? You didn't come on the last passenger train."

"I started on it. Money gave out. Walked the last fifteen miles."

"Then you must 'a' quit the train at Cheyenne. Your shoes don't show no amount of travel."

The last was an accusation. Williams was in an ugly mood. Scanny was signaling for him to desist. He gave no heed, but demanded—

"How explain tramping that far and not barking your shoes?"

"I walked on my hands to save my feet," gravely explained James.

Then he buttoned his coat tightly and dropped on his hands and walked across the room with his feet gracefully hanging over his head.

This maneuver amazed the onlookers. Before Williams could speak young Freedom was saying:

"You know how it is, Williams. After you chased that parcel of hossthieves miles and miles you came back with your hoss as cool and dry as new cabbage leaf."

"This dude's a circus feller all right!" cried Scanny.

"Maybe he is," growled the watchman. "But he's too damned fresh for this burg. And what you mean about my hoss being cool after that last chase?"

"Just what I said," replied young Freedom. "Not a wet hair on him. I'd give a dollar to know how to ride that far and keep my nag from latherin' up."

"Several things I'd like to know," threatened Williams. "Maybe I'll take another ride soon, in your direction, and find out."

"Ride and be damned. You can't run any bluff on me, Fram Williams," defied young Freedom. "And you don't want any of pap's gun, either."

WILLIAMS whistled and almost instantly men were peering through doorways and the window. All were armed.

"You may be a circus shot, young feller," he told James, "but if you unbutton that coat you'll be buried in it. I'm going—"

He ceased speaking, his jaws agape, and stared at the apparition in the doorway of the dining room. The weird looking mystery woman stood on the threshold, her burning gaze focused on the watchman. One bony hand was slightly raised and the thin fingers ges-

tured for Williams to withdraw; then the woman stepped back from view. The effect on Williams was instantaneous. Sweat stood on his leather brown forehead. The hooded eyes struggled to open more widely. Without a word he walked to the bar and stood there with his back to the room. The strange creature's appearance was also the signal for those in doorways and windows to vanish. Without a word Scanny slowly walked to the dining room. There was no elasticity in his step. Young Freedom seized James' arm and hurried him outdoors.

"I can shoot warts off from him without drawing blood," insisted James.

"Come along. That queer woman gets on my nerves more than Williams does. You ride and I'll walk."

But James refused the offer, still feeling lame from his cramped berth in the horse car. Keeping at his friend's stirrup, he demanded—

"Now what about that place?"

"Some twenty-five people live there. Two of the men are too old and feeble to more than sun themselves. Some of the children are too young to steal. All the rest are thieves, or worse. They rob the cars left at the foot of the grade. They do it right along."

"If you know it why don't you tell the railroad people?"

"Because pap is trying to make a living with cattle on the range and sheep in the foothills. Because I have a sister. Williams is railroad watchman. He robs the cars. Ehls, a brakeman, tells the gang what's in the cars left here. Scanny is justice of the peace. He's the leader of the gang. He's stolen enough stock to outfit a string of teams to haul the loot down to Del Norte. They take everything that men and women wear. They have stolen enough groceries to keep several stores running. Then there's whisky, tobacco, coal, cheap jewelry and firearms. No end naming what they've taken. Sharp, the constable, is in it up to his neck. Scanny's making a fortune out of what he sells in the San Juan country."

"How's that death's head of a woman fit in?"

"I don't think any one in Carson knows except it be Scanny. He's scared of her. She came here about two months ago. A look from her, a flip of her hand, and the gang rolls over and plays dead dog."

"Queer outfit. But Scanny can't be the boss if the woman is running things," said James.

They were safe from all eavesdropping, yet young Freedom reined in and scanned the country from horizon to the nearest hollow. Even then he lowered his voice as he confessed:

"I've learned something. Never told it to Lib or pap. If you repeat it pap will smoke war tobacco and get himself killed. I'd probably wake up with my throat cut. It happened this way: I was chasing some strays down on Rush creek. Come upon a dead horse and a white man dying from gunshot wounds. I fetched him water to drink and promised to stand by till he pegged out. He was a hard looking specimen. Bad man all right. The water revived him although he was death struck. He knew he was crossing the ridge. He told me, 'That damned Mac done it. Boss of the biggest gang of thieves and killers in the whole West. I know, because I rode with him for a year. The Carson outfit takes orders from him. He's the brains of the whole big game.'

"I could see he was about to pop off. I bent over him and asked the name of this big boss. Speaking loud and clear, he said, 'His name's MacWith. He done for me, damn him! MacWith done for me.' What do you make of that?"

"He must have been out of his head. A man named MacWith! Plain looney."

"Maybe, but there wasn't any make-believe about the lead some one had pumped into him," said young Freedom. "But here's another point. Scanny is a sneak and a thief. But he hasn't the fighting guts to carry on a big game like this. I figure that he and the rest of the bunch in Carson got to stealing from the railroad, going easy at first. They would take a few boxes out of a carload, but not

enough to center suspicion on them. They went along that way for some time. Suddenly they went crazy. Began to take horses and cattle and all sorts of merchandise. Who in Kit Carson can wear all the clothes and shoes they steal? Who can use all the hardware, or even drink all the liquor? Pap and me have stumbled upon their caches where they've buried tons of stuff. Scanny now freights it to Del Norte, but who is it that distributes it through the San Juan country? Not Scanny. He's working for some one else. I believe the man who killed the poor devil I found dying is that leader. Now in return let's clear up the little mystery about you. How did you get here?"

"In the car they stole horses from. Trying to make Denver to join Cole's Circus. I was with them last season. My money gave out at Fort Wallace. Hostler in the stock car was taken sick at Wallace. Too much rum. He wanted me to take his place. I did. When they came to loot the car I slid out, went down the track unseen and then walked in after the gang had quit the cars."

"Short and sweet. Here comes a horse."

Young Freedom stared at the moving figure for a bit, then cried:

"Good heavens! Something bad has happened. It's Lib, and she's quirting the mare. She's mighty keen to find me."

The two watched the coming of the girl with varied emotions. Fear was in young Freedom's heart. James decided he never had seen a more pleasing picture than the blue eyed maiden, riding astride, a soft white hat covering her yellow curls. Her gloved hand was swinging the quirt. On recognizing her brother she allowed the mare to drop into a gentle canter. Her eyes were blazing as she reined in and announced:

"Tony didn't quit us. He was murdered. Pap found him two miles back under some rocks."

"The Carson crowd!" exclaimed James.

"No!" The girl had not yet paused to wonder why a stranger should be with her brother. "He put up a desperate fight—with a knife. His slayer used a knife. No one in Kit Carson has sand enough to fight that way. No one there who could kill Tony in a knife fight. They shoot from behind. They—"

"Hush, hush, Lib. Calm down—poor Tony. Too bad. Lib, this is Ben James, who comes to work with us. Ben, this is my sister Liberty."

CHAPTER II

AT THE SHEEP CAMP

NATIONAL FREEDOM was a pensive sort of man, much given to combing his fingers through his beard and pondering over matters before expressing an opinion. Once he had made up his mind, however, he was quite positive but without any show of heat. After James had been made known to him and had been greeted with quiet cordiality, he announced slowly:

"Of course Antonio's death can't end like this. There's a debt owed because of that cowardly killing. It must be paid."

"I'll take a ride and hunt the cuss down, pap," vowed the son.

"You'll do your work here as usual until told to do differently," quietly corrected old Freedom. "It's a man's work, Loyal. Justice shall be done in good time. The murderer can't evaporate. Now, young man, just what can you do?" This last was put to James.

"I can ride a horse. I can shoot. I believe I can learn any task you will take the bother to teach me."

"Pap, he can do lots of other things," said young Freedom speaking with much enthusiasm. "He can walk on his hands. He can shoot the stinger off a hornet."

"Please don't," begged James, embarrassed by the wide eyed curiosity of the girl. "Mr. Freedom, I've been with a circus. I don't make a practise of walking on my hands."

"Can you keep accounts?"

"Yes, I can do that."

"Good penman?"

"I think so."

"There's paper and ink. Write down that you will work for me for twelve dollars a month and your keep until I can find out that you're worth more."

James seated himself at the table and wrote, with what seemed to the young people marvelous ease and swiftness. Scrolls and flourishes marked the master penman of the times, and James' statement and signature would have delighted the heart of a New England teacher of writing.

"Beautiful!" applauded the girl.

"Wonderful!" gasped her brother.

"It's pretty," admitted the father. "But it ain't practical out in this country. But it will have to do."

James colored and picked up the pen and said—

"I'll do it less fancy."

With ease and rapidity he put down the offer in minute block letters, his pen fairly streaking across the paper. The whole effect impressed the Freedom family as being something very wonderful.

"That's the style I admire," said Mr. Freedom. "That's hoss sense. Child can read it. Any man who can do that oughter be a teacher instead of rustling his hash out here on the frontier."

Proud of the girl's appreciation, James deftly sketched a galloping horse with a feminine figure meant to be Miss Freedom's. From an artistic point of view it might have been considered crude. To the three Freedoms it was a superlative bit of work.

"Sometimes I doubled up in the variety show that follows the circus and did rapid sketching," explained James.

"May I keep it?" asked the girl.

"Mercy, yes, Miss Liberty. I can do better when I take more time." He dipped his pen and added a rope to the hand of the maiden, and its uncoiling lengths gracefully formed the name of the writer. "My signature, miss," he added timidly.

The young people were deeply impressed. The father combed his thin beard and got down to practicalities.

"Now poor Antonio has been rubbed out, Loyal, you'd better take our new friend to the sheep range before night. Teach him what you can. Stay with him over night if you think it's necessary. The sheep were quiet when I left them with the dogs. I've buried poor Antonio and marked his grave. I suppose I must ride into Carson and report it, but that's worse than a waste of time."

"They're a bunch of thieves, sir," spoke up James. "I'd never bother to tell them."

National Freedom stared at him sternly for a moment, then quietly explained:

"It isn't what I owe the Carson outfit. It's what I owe the State, poor Tony and myself. Count ten, young man, before deciding any important matter. I've found it profitable at times to count a hundred. When I ride into the settlement I'll try to find a half honest man who will help us with the sheep and the cattle."

With no contacts except the occasional wanderers, the brother and sister were prepared to be deeply impressed by the newcomer. James felt as if he had been showing off and he regretted it. Perhaps Mr. Freedom's lack of enthusiasm prompted this feeling. The latter's abstraction impelled him to suggest that he start at once for the sheep. Brother and sister insisted that he take time to eat and rest. The father lifted his head and decided:

"Surely he must eat. We'll have an early dinner. Then he should be on his way. He has much to learn. Drawing pretty pictures and herding sheep are cats of a different color. You have a revolver?"

"Two," said James. "I did a shooting act in the circus."

"That sounds more practical than walking on your hands. You can shoot?"

This time James affected modesty.

"A little," he confessed.

"I'd like to see a sample," demurely encouraged the girl.

James looked to the head of the family. The latter nodded and said:

"It's practical. I don't want to send a pistol-shy young man to the sheep. Loyal can set up a mark."

"I'd rather have a moving target, if you don't mind, sir," said James. "I see some tin cans on the dump at the end of the cook house. If Miss Liberty and Loyal will heave a few high in the air I'll try my luck."

"You'll never be called on to shoot a sheep stealer out of the sky; but go ahead," said Freedom.

The three young people hurried to the end of the cook house, James carrying a gun in each hand. Freedom stepped outside the door and watched.

"Girls, as a rule, can toss better than they can throw," said James. "Toss far and handsome off to the right, Miss Liberty. Loyal, you throw a couple high in the air to the left. I'll stand forward a bit. When I count three please begin."

He took his position and held his two guns shoulder high, pointing to the zenith. He counted slowly, and as he called the last numeral he whirled and with a snap-shot drilled a peach can the girl had tossed some twenty feet. Almost instantly he shifted his gaze and fired twice at the two cans thrown by young Freedom. Blowing the smoke from his guns, he explained to Loyal:

"Just a trick. Shoot before they begin to fall. Catch them at the peak of their rise, if you can. Where there are two objects I plan to nail one before it reaches its peak."

"Yeah?" slowly grunted Freedom. "Are you sure you hit all of them? I saw two give a jump. The two Loyal heaved."

"I plugged Miss Liberty's can as it was traveling from us. Made it jump, but it jumped forward."

Loyal ran and retrieved the cans and proudly displayed them to his father. Each had been torn by the quick lead. Freedom was impressed.

"Good shooting," he admitted. "But cans can't shoot back, of course— Lib, you get busy with some victuals."

An hour later James was given new blankets, and set forth, accompanied by Loyal, to serve as a sheepherder. Loyal explained that there were supplies and utensils at the dead herder's shack. James was inclined to silence as he rode along. His had been a life led among crowds with a background of blaring bands and applause. He had exchanged that for the most lonesome occupation on earth. Loyal broke the silence by saying—

"Of course you know that May is the lambing season, when extra hands are necessary to take care of the young lambs."

"No. I know nothing about sheep except that you can get spring lamb in summer."

"Well, it is as I say. Lib and I and father have to be very busy in May, saving the lambs. We shear in June. The lambs will be weaned in October. Ours are California stock, although many herders buy cheap 'Mexicans', planning to breed a better quality of lambs and then sell the original stock. All our bucks, about three to a hundred ewes, are Merinos."

"What's my work?"

"Let the sheep out of the pens in the morning so they can graze till late afternoon; then you'll bring them back to the pens. They'll go once to water. At sundown they'll enter the pens. The dogs will see to that. It's mighty lonesome work. The great danger is a snowstorm. You won't be bothered with that."

"How many sheep have you?"

"Can't tell exactly, of course. About eight hundred."

"Good heavens! How can one man look after that many?" cried James.

"Oh, the dogs will do that for you. You'll find a whistle at the shack, if you can't furnish your own. I'll dig up a book and bring it out. You'll have time to read when everything is going smooth."

"I'm a great reader, but don't bother with any book. Fetch me a rifle, if you have a spare one. And some .44's for my guns. I have two boxes left."

As they neared the fold in the foothills, Loyal observed his companion's inclination to silence. He asked anxiously—

"Not down in the mouth?"

"No, no. I've roughed it much. But

in a different way. Went to Australia with the circus two years ago. I was thinking of the circus band, blaring and blatting, and the ringmaster snapping his long whip and announcing the Pageant of Nations. Well, it's time I settled down to something different."

"Australia! Gee whiz, but you've traveled!"

They topped a gentle rise and looked down into a shallow basin of grass land, the beginning of the park country. Young Freedom pointed and said:

"See them grazing near the pens? Sun's getting low. Dogs know they should be back. See that!" He pointed to a ram that was inclined to wander to the upland country. A shepherd dog was racing like a streak and turning him back.

THEY rode down to Antonio's small shack close by a small creek. The interior was scrupulously neat. A shotgun was in one corner. A picture of a bullfight, taken from *Harper's Weekly*, was the only wall decoration. A box of candles and a pewter candlestick, the bunk and a stone and mud chimney, the latter affording a small fireplace, were quickly noted by the new tenant.

"There's a box of canned stuff under the bunk, a ham and some bacon behind the cheesecloth. We fetch bread and the like from the ranch-house about every other day," said Loyal. "Any questions?"

"I think I ought to have a horse. Not to use in herding sheep, but to get back to the ranch in a hustle if anything happens."

"I can't leave either of these, but I'll bring one out. Now I must be returning. Don't get lonesome. I'd hate like sin to have you pull out."

It was plain to James that his new friend was a trifle worried about the permanency of the arrangement.

"I'm sticking," said James. "It's a sure bet for you to play. Fetch me out some ink and paper. I'll sketch the hills and mountains and that gorge. Safe for the sheep to go through it?"

"Perfectly. Leads to a larger park beyond, thick with the short grass they love. Have this as a safe rule while you're learning the game. If the dogs are willing for them to go in any direction you can usually bank on its being right. Well, goodby, Ben, till sometime tomorrow."

"Fare thee well."

"Lib will come out with me, most likely. Tomorrow, or next day."

This announcement caused James' face to lighten.

"That will be splendid. I'll be powerful pleased to see both of you. What if any man comes along?"

"All right, if they mind their business and don't scare the herd."

"I get you. I'm the doctor. Captain of the ship. All right. I'll build a fire, make some tea and get acquainted with the dogs. At sundown I'll drive the sheep into the pens."

"Just walk out beyond them and whistle to the dogs. They'll do the rest before you can say scat."

They parted rather solemnly, even going through the formality of shaking hands. After Loyal had passed over the top of the low ridge James sat down and stared at the misty blue and purple loveliness of the mighty heights. It was between performances at the circus, the time for neighborly visiting, for reading and answering letters. Children of the performers were practising to take their parents' places as gymnasts, bareback riders and the like.

It made James feel a trifle low in the mouth. He had no appetite, but for the sake of doing something he made tea and fried some ham and sliced a loaf of Miss Lib's new bread. By the time he had eaten shadows from the mountains were bringing twilight to the opening. Lighting his pipe, he went outdoors. When the sun was half behind the range the dogs bestirred themselves and moved out between the herd and the rocky gorge. Some of the sheep already were straggling

toward the pens. James whistled sharply, and the dogs went into action with a smoothness and precision that amazed him. They did not frighten their charges, but in a trice had the woolly mass slowly making for the pens.

James went down and closed the openings and the dogs now found time to be friendly and inspect him. He fed them liberally on smoked meat and was glad to have them with him when the stars came out. After their supper and a bit of a visit the dogs trotted back to the pens.

After he became accustomed to the silence of the place James slept soundly. At first he missed the *rackety-rack* of the car wheels. When he opened his eyes it was early morning and the dogs were at the door.

That first trip up the gorge to the big park was a wonderful adventure. The lofty heights changed color as rafts of clouds enshadowed them. Striking effects were registered when a sunbeam bored down through a cloud formation and gilded a peak with glory. It appealed to the artist in him, and he wished for paint and brush and canvas and the ability to catch some of the transient splendor. He saw no human being that day until he was driving his flock down the gorge to the lower opening. The day contained so much that was new to him that he forgot to feel lonesome. But when he beheld Loyal Freedom dismounting by the shack his hunger for companionship rushed back.

"Everything all right?" Loyal called cheerily.

"Fine."

"I fetched a hoss. Picketed up the slope a bit. Feel lonesome any?"

"The silence kept me awake a bit. Any news?"

Loyal shook his head.

"I haven't been away from the ranch."

They shook hands as if meeting after a long separation. Loyal continued—

"Lib wanted to come, but I told her she'd be in the way while you were learning the ropes. Girls always are."

James winced.

"Miss Lib is never in any one's way," he insisted. "She's a sight for tired eyes."

"Oh, Lib's all right. Mighty good sister. Sometimes I wish she was a boy; not but what she can do about all I can do. But girls have a queer way of thinking. Never can understand 'em. Sometimes I think they haven't any sense."

"You ought to be ashamed to talk that way," warmly rebuked James.

"I would be if I meant it serious. Lib may ride out with me next time I come. Pap's on track of another hand, and that'll give me a chance to help out with the sheep. Park above the gorge is about grazed out. We'll shift them to new feeding grounds. We'll take a tent along, as there'll be no fetching the flock home to the pens. Come and look at your nag."

The horse showed too much white of the eye, but appeared to be sound. Loyal also had brought more fresh bread, baked that day, and a sugar cake. He grinned and remarked:

"Lib's partial to you. Probably because of your tricks with pen and ink."

That night he felt less lonesome; he was near friends. Several days passed and he was proud to find he was learning much about his flock, that he was beginning to understand his dogs and learning that each had his own personality. He quickly discovered that the four footed guardians knew more about herding sheep than he ever expected to know. He talked his problems over with them, and they would listen with heads cocked to one side. He put questions to them and answered for them. He argued with them, putting their side of the case into speech and invariably surrendering.

"Well, maybe you're right. You must be. You know more about sheep than I do."

Then came a gala day. He had been with the sheep for a week, though it seemed an age, when Miss Liberty rode out with her brother. It was difficult for him to keep from breaking into a run. He waved his hand and his brown face shone as he came up to the handsome young couple.

"I've brought you some cookies and another cake," said the girl.

"The sight of you, Miss Liberty, is better than all the cake in the world," he told her.

"I know you must be awfully lonely," she said. "Folks look awful good after you've been by yourself for awhile."

"We've got a new hand," said Loyal. "That gives pap a chance to be at the house a bit more. That's how Lib could come. Neth, the new man, says the Kansas Pacific will soon be getting after the thieves at Kit Carson. He's a queer coot. Close mouthed. Won't always answer when you speak to him. Then, again, he'll start talking and go like a house on fire. But he's a master hand at cattle."

"He was awfully taken with your writing," added the girl.

"Great scott! That was just writing." James was embarrassed, yet much pleased. The girl must have kept his flourishes, else the new hand could not have seen them.

They remained until nine o'clock, Miss Liberty insisting on preparing the supper. James found life a paradise as long as the three of them could sit around the small fire and dream aloud, and tell what each would do *if* . . .

"Greatest word in the language," mused James. "One of the saddest, too, I'm thinking."

"Jewhittiker! He's a poet, Lib," laughed Loyal.

"I think I understand," she said gently. "Poor Tony might be alive tonight, if—"

"That's it. There's an *if* always just around the corner. If I hadn't been stealing a ride in that car I'd never met you two. At this time I would be tossing knives and breaking glass balls with a gun, and the band would be playing, and the clowns would be jumping and pretending I had shot them."

"Oh, but that must be a wonderful life!" cried the girl. "Lights, music, crowds of people cheering."

"Can you do tricks with knives?" asked the always prosaic Loyal.

"Juggle them a bit. Of course any one can heave a knife if he practises."

"It was a knife fighter, and a mighty good one, who killed Tony," mused Loyal.

"And we don't just know what *if* prevented him escaping," said James.

"Let's not talk about that," said the girl. "Let's sing."

James was quick to take the cue and began the sentimental "Lorena," second only to "Home, Sweet Home" in popularity. The Freedoms quickly joined in. There followed some of Stephen Foster's, and others, reminiscent of the late Civil War. James mentally decided that it was the happiest evening of his life, and then and there the old lure of the circus left him. Sentiment and a pretty girl! What more could mortal man desire? After they departed he was busy for an hour, remembering and analyzing all that had been said. That night he wished he were a poet and could set down some of the pleasant fantasies that trooped through his thoughts. It was a night for pleasant dreams. James felt it and was glad to turn in, believing a wonderful rendezvous was awaiting him.

A FEW days later Neth, the new hand, rode out with supplies and several numbers of the *Rocky Mountain News*. The newspapers were more welcome than anything the ranch-house could have sent. After the first few minutes James listed Neth as being rather dull. His slowness to talk and his manner of staring in silence, of waiting a few moments before replying to a simple question, augmented this impression.

Without moving from his tracks, James hungrily scanned the headlines of the papers, jealously reserving a thorough reading until night. He was aroused by Neth's query—

"Swap jobs?"

James was interested. The stolid fellow would make an ideal man for sheep. The thought of riding herd with young Freedom, with frequent contacts with

Miss Liberty, stirred his imagination. He eagerly asked—

"Did Mr. Freedom say anything about that?"

Neth shook his head. James' hopes fell.

"Then I don't see how we can trade jobs. That's for Mr. Freedom to say."

"I like sheep." His eyes were as dull as cloth-covered buttons.

The flock had been returned from the upper park and were cropping the short grass near the pens.

"You write master pretty," added Neth.

"Any one can write well if they practise," said James. Neth shook his head. "You haven't practised enough," James added.

"Can't write good. Let's swap jobs."

Concealing his growing irritation, James repeated:

"That's for Mr. Freedom to say. You can ask him."

"I'll ask him."

The two entered the shack to leave the provisions and the precious papers. Neth halted in the middle of the small room, forgetful of the heavy bag of provisions he was carrying, to admire some of James' pen and ink sketches of the mountains.

"Master pretty," he mumbled.

"If I had some paints I could make them look more real." James was now wishing his visitor would depart.

"I like ink."

"Put down your load and we'll cook some ham."

"I understand sheep. I'll pen 'em."

"You know how to go about it?"

Neth nodded and went out. He whistled sharply to the dogs. The intelligent animals began circling the outskirts of the flock and, although it was a bit early for the sheep to file into the pens, they reluctantly obeyed their canine masters. Neth returned and found James reading an account of the circus performance at Denver, entirely lost to his surroundings. Without a word Neth set about preparing the supper.

James stepped to the door as the last of the sheep were driven into the pens. He walked down the slope to close the openings. He knew some of the family had been to Kit Carson, and he wondered which one had kept him in mind and had procured the newspapers. He was aroused from his dreaming by the glimpse of something showing for a moment beyond the farther side of the nearest pen. He was positive that it was neither sheep nor dog. As the dogs made no outcry he knew that it could not be some wild animal after a supper.

A streak of fire, and the singing lead caused him to drop in a heap.

"Damn' if I didn't fetch him, boys!" cried the marksman. "I'll pace off the distance. It'll be something to talk about."

"Shut up! Maybe he isn't dead," a second voice cried.

"If he ain't he soon will be!" And leaping from cover, a shaggy headed man advanced on what he believed to be a dead, or mortally wounded; sheepherder.

A shotgun roared from the shack but did no damage. James remembered that Neth was wearing no gun when he arrived. The second intruder left cover to mount the slope and pass between James and the shack. As he ran he shouted—

"I'll take care of the man in the house!"

James' assailant, a gun in each hand, came on, firing as he ran. The lead fell short. James threw up a gun and fired once, bringing his enemy to the ground. The shotgun roared again. The second man had turned about on discovering that James still was in action, and opened fire on him. James twisted about and fired twice, rapidly, and the man crumpled to the ground with a smashed leg.

"Surrender or I'll kill you!" warned James as he jumped to his feet.

The prostrate man tossed his revolver to one side and groaned—

"I cave."

James advanced, a gun half raised to guard against treachery. Neth rushed from the shack and made for the fallen man.

"Stand back, you fool! Get out of range!" yelled James.

Neth kept on and gained the wounded man. Then, to James' horror and amazement, the herder yanked out a knife and leaped upon the helpless figure. James heard the frantic:

"Don't! Don't! What—"

The *thud-thud* of heavy blows stilled the protests.

With a cry of horror James broke into a run, shouting:

"Damn you! Why did you do that? I wanted him alive, to tell what he knew. He had surrendered."

Neth stabbed his knife into the ground to clean the blade and said defensively:

"No good. Kill all of them."

"But this man was helpless. He would have told us much. I wanted him to talk. You've spoiled it."

Neth stared stolidly at the silent figure and repeated:

"No good. Freedom wants 'em all dead. Shotgun no good. Jammed." This was a long speech for Neth.

"You ride back to the ranch as fast as your nag will carry you. Tell them what's happened. Tell it without the girl hearing you. Understand?"

Neth nodded and trotted back to his horse and rode off. Sickened by the tragedy, especially by Neth's knifework, James went to the shack. The shotgun was on the floor. A shell had caught, thereby preventing Neth from using it for the third time.

After extracting the shell James went outdoors and viewed the man he had shot. Like the man up the slope, he was a stranger. Returning to the shack, but not entering, he sat down and waited. It seemed a very long time before Freedom senior galloped up, accompanied by Neth.

"What's this? What's this? What's it all about?" demanded Freedom. "Neth can't talk only a few words at a time."

"Two dead men to be inspected and buried. They attacked me. I shot the one nearest the pens. Wounded the other. He surrendered, but before I could prevent it Neth knifed him."

"Can't blame him overmuch for that," said Freedom grimly. "There's no law here to hand the rascal over to. He's better dead."

"It was sickening. And we lost the chance to learn something about those who stood behind him. It was needlessly brutal. At least, it seems so to me."

"Rather brutal their planning to murder you," reminded Freedom. "Neth, fetch the spade you brought along. We'll bury the bodies near that pile of loose rocks and heap the rocks over them. We must work fast as it'll soon be dark. If we could kill off a few more they'd give us a wide berth."

Only one item of interest was found on the dead men. It was a rough pencil sketch. Freedom could make nothing out of it. James examined it for a minute, and then explained:

"The two men sent here to kill me didn't know the lay of the land. This circle is the hollow. The crosses are the pens. That straggly line is the creek. Here is the shack. Those two short lines are the gorge. They came down through the gorge from the upper park."

He paused and examined the map more carefully and measured the distances. Then he announced:

"This is drawn to scale. The distance to the gorge and the distance to the pens are to scale. It's three-quarters of a mile to the gorge. Here's a small circle to the east. It measures, to my shack, a trifle more than three times the distance from here to the gorge. It stands for the ranch-house."

"By Judas! The skunks planned to wipe us all out and take everything. Neth, I'm glad you done for that critter. I couldn't have done it, but I'm glad he's dead."

"No good. Better dead," grunted Neth.

"It's a bad business, anyway you look at it," said James. "It's several cuts above anything the Carson crowd ever tried. You ride back to the ranch as fast as you can travel, Mr. Freedom. Others may be striking there."

Freedom flung himself on his horse, crying:

"Neth can stay! Neth can stay—"

"He goes with you!" interrupted James. "Ride! I've had my lesson. I can stand them off. Ride!"

CHAPTER III

THE BILL OF SALE

AFTER the tragedy at the sheep camp James found his isolation too dreary to endure. By Loyal he sent word to old Freedom that he must be given other work or leave. Neth relieved him the next day, his face as stolid as ever, but with a glint of satisfaction in his dull eyes.

"I like tending sheep," he said. "Gives a man time to rest and think."

"Lots of time to think," agreed James as he flung himself on to his horse to ride to the ranch-house.

Freedom and his son greeted him cordially, and the former said:

"I'll try you with cattle. But your first job is away from the ranch. You and Loyal are to make Wild Horse and drive back some blooded stock I've dickered for. I'm going to improve the breed and sell prime beef at fancy prices."

"Pap's 'fraid some of the stock will be stolen if sent down by the railroad," added Loyal.

"Son, you keep shut about what your pap thinks. You boys can start as soon as you can rope out your horses."

This form of activity was a rare adventure to James. It was in his blood to be on the move. He firmly believed the monotony of sheepherding would drive him crazy. The course was parallel to the railroad and often in sight of it, and the grade made for slow traveling. They avoided entering the settlement of Kit Carson, as the knowledge of their absence might prompt a raid on the sheep or cattle. It was a big holiday for James. He boiled over with questions, even inquiring about various individuals in Kit Carson.

"More wagon trains going south, heavily loaded. The gang is trying to clean up what they've stolen and hidden."

"And the spectral woman? She still stalks about?"

"The one who makes you think of ghosts? Yeah. I saw her two or three times when riding to town. I'll tell you something, but you keep shut." Without waiting for any promises he lowered his voice and continued, "Pap's started to make our surroundings honest. He wrote a letter to General David J. Cook, head of the Rocky Mountain Detective Association, asking him to do something. He also wrote the railroad company and sent a copy of his letter to Cook."

"That places him in deadly danger if any of the gang know about it," said James.

"No one will learn anything. I'm keen to be back when the big roundup takes place. They'll have to arrest the whole town."

"Maybe they have a hint already. Maybe that's why the stolen goods are being hurried south."

"I don't think so. A new man is running things at the Del Norte end. The white man I found shot gave his name as MacWith. Whispered it when he was dying. He has brains enough to know such rare pickings can't be had forever. I'm betting he's ordered Scanny to rush everything south."

The trip was unmarked by any unusual incidents. Six pedigreed bulls and thirty cows were turned over to the two young men after a delay of two days, and the leisurely return was commenced. The mixed herd caused much trouble, and at first James was of small assistance. As time was not all important, young Freedom struck off southeast from the railroad and avoided being seen by the men at Kit Carson.

"Any news?" was James' first question.

The girl answered, her father being out with the herd—

"Fifty head were run off the first night you were away."

"And pap's trailin' them?" anxiously asked Loyal.

"He wanted to, but I said I'd go with him, so he quit. But he's powerful angry.

How did our new cowboy get along?"

Loyal spoke warmly of his proficiency and Miss Liberty was loud in her praise. James accepted it all as so much pleasant banter, yet it was a pleasure to have engaged the girl's attention. This homecoming meant much to him. Now he could see Miss Liberty every day, either at the house or when she rode out to the herd.

For several days all went smoothly; then came Neth, the sheepherder. His wooden expression revealed nothing of the bombshell he was about to explode. It was evening, and Miss Liberty was clearing away the supper dishes. Her father and James were present, the latter about to ride to the herd and join Freedom and spell him on night duty.

Miss Liberty placed food back on the table and Neth greedily bolted a hearty meal. Then he produced a sheet of paper and said—

"Your man and a helper come and took the five hundred sheep."

Freedom gaped in amazement and stared wildly at the paper Neth had placed in his hands.

"You sold some sheep, pap?" prompted the girl.

"No! Keep quiet!"

He proceeded to examine the writing more carefully. With a furious exclamation he waved the paper wildly. His daughter snatched the paper and scanned it hurriedly. It was her turn to display surprise and anger.

"Why, pap!" she cried. "This is a bill of sale for five hundred sheep. It's signed by you."

"It ain't signed by me," roared her father. "Don't I know if I've been selling any sheep? I never heard of this Martin Jules!"

Neth blinked and stared wonderingly at the excited man. In a low voice he said:

"But this writing looks mortally like your hand of write. Didn't you write it?"

"Damnation! No!" thundered Freedom.

"But who could imitate your writing so closely?" asked the girl.

Freedom glanced aside at James, and the latter felt his face burning.

"I don't know for sure who imitated it," replied Freedom. "I'm going to have a talk alone with Loyal. Neth, you trail along to ride herd."

"I'm to go with you after the sheep?" spoke up James.

"No. You go to the sheep camp and watch what's left," ordered Freedom grimly. "Neth, which way did they go?"

"Up into the high opening. Two men and two dogs. But this paper with your name—"

"Will you shet up?" And Freedom ran from the house and leaped into the saddle.

James stared at the girl. She met his gaze and held it although her face grew warm and pink.

"And you believe it, too," he murmured.

She shook her head and replied:

"I can't believe it. But it all makes me feel very miserable."

"Miserable because in your heart you do believe it," he decided. "Even now you're wondering who else but me could imitate another man's writing as closely as your father's writing is imitated in that bill of sale." He strapped on his guns and took his hat from a peg.

"You're leaving us?" she demanded in a low voice.

Her eyes were half closed as he faced about.

"You're thinking it's a confession of guilt," he said.

"I've believed in you, even in the face of that paper. I've seen you imitate pap's writing, mine and Loyal's. The bill of sale is written in that greenish ink, such as you took to the sheep camp. Still I will believe in you—if you don't run away."

"I'm not running away. I'm going after the sheep."

"I'll believe in you in the face of everything if you will stay here."

"I can't. I'm going after the sheep. But I shall be back."

She watched him pass through the door and she followed him as far as the thres-

hold. She saw him strike off afoot toward the sheep camp. She called to him to halt. He swung about, impatient to be on his way. She ran from the house and flung a saddle on her horse and joined him.

"Take my pony," she urged. "I'll believe in you, or never believe in any one else again. The pony is mine. You'll be careful?"

"I must be very careful, Miss Liberty," he assured her. "For if I get myself killed you three will always believe I forged that bill of sale. It's all a blind mystery to me. But I happen to be honest." With that he swung into the saddle and was off.

AT THE camp he found the remainder of the sheep in the pens. There were but two points of egress from the wide hollow. He had come over one; the other led through the gorge to the upper park. His mind was in a whirl of torment as he raced along. He was wondering what he would do when he came up with the flock. The two men might be reputable citizens who had been imposed upon by the clever forgery. In that case the matter would be taken into court, with every likelihood of his being branded a liar, thief and forger.

"The sheep must come back," he told himself. "Once they're in Freedom's possession he can deny the bill of sale. I'll swear I never wrote it. He may swear I did. But he'll stand a good chance of keeping his property."

It was not until well within the gorge that he sensed the inconsistency of the alleged owners' handing over the bill of sale, their sole guarantee of ownership. A buyer must keep a bill of sale to show as a guarantee of his title when disposing of his purchase in Denver, or elsewhere. The two strangers had parted with it. He conned this unusual action for some minutes and then slapped his thigh and exclaimed:

"It has to be that. The bill was sent to the ranch by that lunkhead to make confusion while the skunks got a long lead. They're banking on reaching another flock and mixing the sheep or, more likely, they're confident of disposing of the sheep before any chase can overtake them."

He spurred his mount into a gallop.

He had been told there was no egress for sheep from the upper park except through the gorge. Now he was convinced this information was incorrect. Thieves never would drive the sheep into a pocket where they could be recovered. If the flock were grazing in the big park, then he must believe the strangers to be honest, even if very simple minded men. If he found no sheep he must conclude the men were thieves. The climax of the situation came when he reached the upper end of the gorge and stood in the stirrups and shaded his eyes. He sighed deeply in relief when he was unable to discover any of the flock. His gaze quickened to suspicion as he believed he detected motion in the scrub growth on the east side of the opening.

He reined and stared about, feeling that he was being watched. Then he turned and started slowly toward the gorge. Twenty minutes later he was riding along the north side of the opening. He continued until he came to the point where he had observed motion in the growth. Slipping to the ground, he led his horse forward and struck into an old Indian trail. That he was on the right track was evidenced by bits of wool caught by protruding stubs and branches.

With gun in his free hand he assailed a long slope of moderate grade. For half a mile he mounted upward and then, suddenly, found himself debouching into another and smaller park. In the west a plume of smoke was rising from a campfire. Mounting, and guiding the horse with his knees, he bore down on the camp, a gun in each hand. The sheep were some distance from the camp, closely herded by dogs. Two men were cooking at the fire. On beholding the horsemen they displayed no interest at first. As he drew nearer they leaped to their feet and ran to their horses. They had not unsaddled.

With a leap each was mounted and riding to meet the newcomer. Veering to the left to keep both of them on the same side, James swung over the side of his horse, like an Indian, his right hand holding a gun. There were no preliminaries, no hails, no questions. The two riders, hairy of visage, opened fire at long range, their lead whistling wild. After the first string of shots had satisfied him that they had emptied their guns, James swung back into the saddle and spurred toward them. The two promptly separated to force him to pass between them.

James wheeled at right angles and fired twice. A horse went down, flinging its rider violently to the ground. With a yell of triumph James rode toward the other. This opponent did not relish the situation, and he swerved away and opened fire. At a distance of a hundred feet James shot him from the saddle with his left hand gun.

A gun cracked behind him and he felt his hat jump convulsively. Pivoting, he beheld the dismounted man on his knees, holding a .45 in two hands to secure steadiness. James jumped his horse to one side, dropped the reins and commenced firing with both guns. He saw his man lurch sidewise and cease firing. The figure grotesquely bowed far forward and fell face down.

Reining in and flinging himself from the saddle, James covered the prostrate figure and ran forward.

"Surrender!" he cried, advancing with a cocked gun.

"Done for. Don't shoot!"

"You stole the sheep!"

"Quit it. Mac, damn him, sent me to this!"

"MacWith?"

The man tried to lift his head and demanded faintly—

"Who speaks his name?"

"Where is MacWith?"

"I reckon I'm dying."

"Let me help you!"

"Dark. Dark. Grows darker. MacWith—Del Norte—answer in Del Norte. You'll be s'prised—"

His speech was cut off as one snaps a thread. James turned him on his back. He was dead. James quickly caught the two horses and dropped their reins over the horn of his saddle and then proceeded to inspect the second man. He was dead too.

James loaded the two thieves on their horses and then whistled to the dogs and started the sheep on the backward trail.

THE PASSAGE down the narrow path was difficult. When he finally emerged with the flock on the north side of the park he was in time to discover Freedom and his son riding back toward the rocky gorge. He fired a gun and instantly had their attention. They raced toward him, amazed at seeing the sheep and startled at beholding the two silent riders.

"Gawdfrymighty! What you been up to?" yelled Freedom.

"I've been up to returning your sheep, sir. For good measure I've fetched back the thieves. Give them a look. Know them?"

Father and son swung from the saddle and examined the dead men. Neither was able to identify them.

"Perfect strangers," said Freedom. "Reckoned they'd be some of the Scanny outfit."

"Bigger game than that."

Freedom plucked at his beard and said—

"To think, Ben, I ever doubted you!"

"Forget it. There was the writing. And there was the same kind of ink that you use."

"That's just it," groaned Freedom. "Everything was too perfect against you. I oughter remembered that if you was crooked enough to sell the sheep you'd be too smart to do it in a way that could be seen with half an eye."

"There's oceans of that kind of ink," said Loyal. "But what a game for them to try."

"Loyal wouldn't hark a second to you being the thief," added Freedom. "Just blame me alone."

"I'm not blaming any one for suspecting me. I do blame the two of you for not seeing something that was as plain as an elephant's foot. The bill of sale. The three of us should have known it was a crooked game when Neth fetched you that bill of sale. No honest man in his senses would part with his bill of sale any more than he'd give away the deed to his house. I'll admit it didn't strike me till I got about this far on my hunt."

"You handled it wonderful!" cried Freedom.

"Just followed my nose. Giving the bill to Neth showed they were crooked. If they were crooked they never would drive sheep into this park if there wasn't a back door somewhere. But now that you know I'm honest, Mr. Freedom, I'm going to draw my pay and take a little ride."

"Ben! Ben! Can't you forgive an old fool?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You took me, a tramp, on trust. I didn't believe there was any one in Colorado who could imitate your writing as I can. I'm going away; but I hope to return."

"Don't go away. Stick around with us. There's going to be rare doings at Kit Carson. All the crooks will soon be rounded up."

"Yeah," added Loyal. "Stay and see the fun. That queer woman—the death woman—has started south in one of Scanny's freight outfits. Saw her while I was riding herd."

"She's a ghost," mumbled Freedom. "I don't believe any one ever heard her speak. She isn't real. Searched these two men? What'll we do with them?"

"Bury them up here. Cover them with rocks. I haven't gone through their clothes," said James.

Freedom explored the clothing. Both the thieves were liberally supplied with money. Among the coins were two discs, one for each man. They bore the numbers 15 and 21 respectively. James slipped both into his pocket and insisted that Freedom take charge of the money, some seven hundred dollars.

"Now, Ben, I want to find you when I make the ranch. So you ride on ahead and spell Lib, who's riding herd. Tell Neth we're coming with the sheep."

Leading the two horses, James rode off and did not lessen his pace until breasting the slight rise that led to the shack in the lower park. Neth came up from the pens, wagging his head.

"Got 'em?" he asked.

"Looks that way. Two of them. Mr. Freedom and Loyal are coming with the sheep. Have the pens ready."

"Big fight?"

"A quick one."

"What did they say?"

"All the talking was done with lead."

"Cur'ous works! Derned thieves. Say, you must be a reg'lar humdinger."

James rode on. At the ranch he left the girl's horse and one of the thieves' horses. He rode the other out to the herd. Miss Liberty was quick to discover him and rode to meet him.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came back," she greeted. "Pap felt mighty sorry and mean when I told him how you felt, and how you started off alone. Never mind the sheep. We can get more."

"You're not using your eyes, nor your head," prompted James as he patted the neck of his new mount.

The girl blinked the tears from her eyes and demanded:

"Where did you get that horse? Doesn't belong around here."

"Got it where I got the sheep. Yes, I found them and brought them back. Your pony is at the ranch-house. None the worse for his ride. You go home. I'll bed the cattle. Your pap and Loyal will be along soon."

"The house can take care of itself. I'm interested to know how you got the sheep back—and in the excitement over at Kit Carson."

"Overtook two men. Made them surrender. But what do you mean about excitement at the settlement? You scarcely can see that far from here."

"The people there are excited over something. I saw two wagons crawl

toward the head of the creek and return at a gallop. Horsemen are riding back and forth. Another of Scanny's outfits has started south."

"Two wagons went out toward the creek with heavy loads and returned empty," mused James.

"Exactly. They've been hiding their plunder in a hurry and sending what they can to the San Juan country."

"Del Norte. One of the thieves said the answer would be found there. Miss Lib, please tell your father and Loyal that I'm riding south. Look for me when I get back. I must beat that last freight outfit. I must take an extra nag along. I'm riding back to the corral to rope out the horse I left there. You'll be all right alone for awhile?"

"I'm alone quite a bit. But why do you have to run more risks? Let the law officers catch the thieves."

"It's like this. I'm hoping to settle down in this country. I want my property safe. Feeling that way, I must do my part to make it safe. I must go."

"All right."

He leaned down and confidentially told her—

"This stretch of country wouldn't interest me if you didn't live here."

"All right." Now her voice was tremulous. "You'll be sure to come back? I mean—you'll be very careful?"

CHAPTER IV

THE ANSWER AT DEL NORTE

NONE of the Freedoms would have recognized Ben James at sight could either have glimpsed him when he penetrated the cañon country and entered the town of Del Norte near the head of the Rio Grande Del Norte. His two horses had permitted a swift journey as far as Fort Garland. Then he had followed a seemingly lazy, purposeless mode of living. For two weeks he loitered about the fort and gave much patronage to the post trader in the matter of drinks for soldiers. He dropped some money at monte and won some at poker, and extended his acquaintance to the gambling brotherhood. All these contacts brought him much information concerning Del Norte, both the town and the people. The gamblers assured him that it was a "swift" town and quite remote from the law. He repeated this to a veteran mountain man, who explained:

"Town's all right. Just a bad crowd sort of runnin' things just now. When enough real men git the *sabe* of it the lawless critters will *vamos pronto* or look up a rope."

Further discreet talks with the mountain man elicited the information that Del Norte was cursed and bossed by a small ring of ruthless men, who worked quite openly.

"Some cuss in the driver's seat gives orders that are carried out. Takes a strong man to drive that outfit. Honest folks know things ain't what they oughter be when a dead man's found, who wa'n't killed in any saloon row. The boss of Del Norte speaks once, then *zing!* Knife in the throat. If they was more of a noisy outfit it would be easier to round 'em up. More'n once a man's got mad and has been ready to squeal; but he always got the knife before he could bleat. One of the last men to peg out was sick of a wastin' fever. He let on he wanted to die clean. He sent for a storekeeper to hear him make a clean breast of it. When MacWith entered the room he found the feller dyin' like a stuck pig."

"MacWith!"

"Heard of him, I s'pose. Big trader."

"I understand he's the biggest trader up there."

This last talk gave a new slant to the game ahead of him. The dying man found on the Freedom range had said MacWith was responsible for his death wound. Then this MacWith was away from Del Norte at times. What was rather curious was the mountain man's insistence that some members of the band were in ignorance of the leader whom they served. The man who would have

confessed and who was found dying from knife wounds evidenced the mountain man's ignorance on this point.

James was consumed by a desire to have finished with his business and to be back at the Freedom ranch. Yet his bearing was that of a purposeless wanderer. He rode up to Del Norte and secured a room over a store and wore all the manners of one lazily content to watch the days succeed each other. His first move was to visit MacWith's store. A young man waited on him and incidentally let fall the information that the proprietor was down at Alamosa on business.

James took his meals at the High Ace Saloon and gave battle to the various table games. It was while sitting by a window in the Ace, eating his noonday meal, that he saw the "ghost woman" of Scanny's hotel. She was walking rapidly, looking neither right nor left. A Mexican mule skinner crossed himself as she passed him. James drew back, for he feared lest the woman recognize him despite his short beard and new clothes. There was something penetrating in her hollow black eyes.

He loitered to the bar and remarked:

"Queer looking woman just passed. Looks like she was dead. Who is she?"

"None of my business," firmly replied the bartender. "None of yours, either, stranger, if you love sunshine and twitterin' birds."

"I didn't intend to be nosey. She's sort of unusual, but I'm no hand to ask questions."

"That's fine for the trade. Fewer questions you ask the more money you'll spend in this town. From north, or south?"

"Pueblo. Heard there was some rich diggings out this way. Heard a heap about the San Juan country."

"Fat diggings for them who is in the know of it. Greenhorns don't git very far. We can use another man behind the bar. No guessing about your money. Can have it every night if you want it."

"I can't work till I've looked around a bit," said James.

"Meaning till you're broke. Well, this is as good a place as any to get broke in."

James grinned widely and nodded. There was a lull in the trade. He remarked—

"You have some good stores here."

"Uh-huh?"

"I saw a display of pocket and belt knives in MacWith's store that would do credit to any store in the West."

"Uh-huh?"

"I was surprised to find such bully stock in clothes, boots and other stuff in this out of the way place."

"Uh-huh?"

"Can't you say anything else?"

"Uh-huh."

James drew out a handful of silver and gold to pay for his dinner.

"One dollar," said the bartender.

James spread the coins on the bar and unintentionally displayed the disc marked "15." The bartender was quick to see it: his gaze froze. "Four bits for the dinner," he mumbled. Then, after hastily glancing around he touched James' hand and hoarsely whispered, "For Gawd's sake, don't git me in wrong with the kingpin! Don't say I said anything about nothin'."

"I'll say nothing that you've said. And you've said nothing. Cheer up." The man mopped his forehead and glanced uneasily toward the door.

"Where does the woman live who looks like a ghost?" asked James.

"You should ask me," snarled the bartender. "Like you didn't know." Then with a swift effort to placate, he whispered, "Same old job. Runs MacWith's store. If I thought you'd bleat any words of mine I'd step into the cardroom and have it over with at once, by shooting myself."

"You'll live to be a million for any harm I shall fetch you. I've just come here. Curious, like any stranger. Traded at MacWith's store. Probably I'll ask questions about every place I go into. Natural hankering to get the lay of the land."

HE LEFT the saloon and sauntered down the street. The various stores displayed an amazing miscellany for a mountain camp. There were women's bonnets and shawls, dress goods and shoes, filling one window. In another was much jewelry. Several Mexican women were gathered before this particular window. In some stores were musical instruments in a profusion and variety entirely out of proportion to the locale and population. Hats, caps, laces and featherbeds were for sale. The last was markedly out of place in a warm zone. Tobacco stores carried a line that would be considered suitable for the Windsor in Denver. The several saloons were stocked with wines and liquors that would do credit to any bar.

As he sauntered along James noticed several rough looking citizens filing from the MacWith store. At the window, watching them, was the hollow cheeked, ghastly visage of the ghost woman. James instinctively stepped into a doorway that her gaze might not rest on him. After she had withdrawn from the window he went down the street and turned into a monte place and took a table in a shadowy corner. A group of Mexicans were chattering volubly at the bar. A boy came for his order. Although he had but recently eaten he ordered corn batter cakes dipped in a stew of red chile, with tomatoes, onions and cheese chopped fine—and a glass of beer.

One of the men he had seen leaving the MacWith store entered a few steps beyond the threshold and glanced around the room. James remembered him by his flaming red beard. The sun glare was in the man's eyes and the corner was in the shadows. Redbeard withdrew and, from the window, James saw him enter the next building.

"Looks like I was being trailed," murmured James. "I'm more scared of that she-devil than I am of the big boss."

He remained in the place for nearly an hour and then repaired to the outskirts of the town and entered a low adobe building that held much shadow and but little sunshine. Two soldiers, on leave from Fort Garland, were noisily drinking fiery *mescal* at the bar. Pulling his hat low, James advanced to the end of the bar and called for beer. One of the soldiers was saying:

"That death-woman's back. Times ought to be lively here."

The Mexican proprietor darted him a quick glance and appeared to be nervous.

"Alamosa's tougher'n this place," argued the second soldier.

"Bah! Alamosa ain't a dirty deuce to an ace to this burg when the death-woman's on the job."

With hands outspread in protest the proprietor warned—

"Señor, it ees a bad talk."

"*Muchacho*, go to hell," replied the soldier.

"*Muere!*" muttered the Mexican, and only James caught it.

"This town's rough?" prompted James lazily.

"Good town!" exclaimed the proprietor.

"*Caballero*, you're drunk," informed the first soldier. Then to James, "This burg's more'n tough. Deadly. Folks here all outlaws."

"Hush, hush, you fool!" begged his companion.

"And run by outlaws," added the other.

The proprietor's dark eyes widened with terror. Under his breath he muttered a string of oaths. The second soldier warned:

"Hold your tongue, you fool! Don't you want to leave this hole alive?"

The traducer of the town went limp against the bar and told James:

"I was jus' foolin', mister. No better burg in the West than this little ol' Del Norte."

"You've talked too much," whispered James. "Both you men better take a *pasear* down the valley. Night here is bad."

The two quit the place forthwith, and James was glad to see they had horses awaiting them at the rear end of the saloon.

As he had done before, only now he did so purposely, James fished out a handful of coins and, paying for his luncheon and drinks, displayed the disc marked 15. The proprietor, reaching for a silver dollar, snatched back his hand, his gaze held by the coin.

"Eet is on what you say the house, señor," he announced in a trembling voice.

He persisted in his refusal to take any pay. James left a dollar on the bar and returned to his corner to spy on the street. His nerves, if not his reason, were warning him that a file of executioners might appear at any moment. Now he was positive that the death-woman had recognized him. As he was leaning against the wall, drowsy from the heat, the man with the red beard came hurriedly through the doorway and advanced to the bar. His voice was harsh and peremptory as he demanded:

"You talk straight. I'm looking for a young *hombre*, a stranger. Has he been in here?"

The proprietor waved his hands and loosed a flood of Spanish. The man struck the bar with his fist and warned:

"I know you understand me. Answer me!"

The Mexican gestured wildly and talked rapidly under his breath. The effect on Redbeard was obvious. He scratched his head and seemed to be puzzled. Then he swung about and stared at the dim corner. By this time James had a gun in his lap. Redbeard came to him and, resting his hairy hands on the small table, said:

"Stranger, new folks in Del Norte are looked up. What you got in your clothes to show who you be and what's your business? I'm the town marshal."

Without a word James produced the numbered disc and dropped it on the table. The big man picked it up and held it to the light of the small window. His expression told of great surprise.

"But this is Burt's number," he blurted out.

"Burt's dead. His number came to me," James explained.

"How did it come to you?" The question was a challenge.

"MacWith, he—"

"You fool! You must be green to go naming names," angrily interrupted Redbeard. "Where'd all this happen?"

"A few miles west of Kit Carson, up in the valley. Burt was shot stealing sheep. I got to him when he was dying. The chief gave me his number."

"That's mighty funny. Burt wa'n't alone on that trip."

"No. 21 was with him. He was rubbed out. Now what's your number?"

"Call me Ed. No numbers just yet. I vow I don't understand."

"I do," calmly said James. "A woman —no names—not knowing what happened up north, spotted me as a stranger. She sent some of you boys to look me up. Your orders, probably, are to kill. The chief would be very angry. I called there to find him before the woman came. I'm waiting for him to get back. Lift up the table."

Redbeard mechanically obeyed and set the small table one side. This maneuver revealed the .44 covering him. As he glared James belted the gun, motioned for him to sit down and explained:

"The woman didn't understand. I'll drop in and explain later. I've waited for the chief, as I've never had any business with her. I don't like to do business with a woman, anyway."

"Seeing as how you're sound, why don't you walk up with me and tell her now?"

"I won't be bossed by a petticoat. Chief understands that. I'll wait."

The death-woman's messenger fanned his steaming face with his hat and confessed:

"I don't know what to say or do. The chief ain't here. No one knows when he'll pull in. I don't want to rub out a man that he's took in. And I don't hanker to go back to the woman and have her think you've run a bluff on me."

"I'll call at the store this evening. It'll be twice I've called there today."

"Well, we'll let it go at that until she says different. But if you try to pull out

of this town you'll be planted, number or no number."

"I haven't run away yet. And tell your men to keep clear of me till I've had time to see the woman or the chief."

Redbeard disliked his errand of returning to report failure to the grim woman. He urged—

"Best thing you can do is to go back with me and keep with a few of us boys till the chief comes."

James shook his head and insisted:

"Nothing was said about that when I got my number. I came here to see the chief. When he says I'm to take orders from that woman that'll be time enough for me to do it."

Redbeard surrendered, saying—

"All right, *amigo*, I'll tell her what you say."

Left alone, James felt he was in a state of siege. He dared not venture out on the hot street so long as the woman's edict stood. On the other hand he was comforted in believing that neither Redbeard nor his pals would be quick to send to death a man for whom the chief vouched. But this waiting got James nothing, he feared. All his plans were upset. His mode of procedure, as outlined, had been very simple and effective. He had proposed to drop in on MacWith, shoot him and escape. He had not doubted his ability to do this. Now he was finding his prey absent and the death-woman reigning in his stead. To face MacWith, who would be on his guard after learning that a man claimed to be No. 15, would be suicide.

"But how the devil can I know when he comes if I stick here?" James asked himself.

He could find no answer. Then came the decision that he must steal away from the town and find a hiding place from which he could spy on the enemy.

HE KEPT in his corner, ordering an occasional drink, which he spilled on the floor. Late afternoon patrons began to gather for an evening of gambling and carousing. Taking a position at the monte table, where he could watch the door, he played with varying luck until the big evening rush set in. Then he felt more at ease. The windows of the place were open and there was a back door.

He ate a light supper, then switched to the faro layout and played often enough to keep his place. And all the time he was watching the door. An argument broke out over a deal, and for a moment James' watchfulness ceased. He was aroused to the fact that something tragic had happened by a loud murmuring of voices and the rush of a score of men toward the door. Then the barrier of men swept back and was broken, and James beheld the figure of a man in blue lying on the floor.

He quit the table and asked the proprietor—

"What's the matter with that soldier?"

"Not'ing now. He ees dead," whispered the proprietor.

Then James recognized the dead man as the soldier who had talked freely that morning concerning the rapacity of MacWith.

"He was picked up two miles below here. He must 'a' had a fight," cried a miner.

"Who found him?" some one asked.

"I did," spoke up a familiar stolid voice, and James was amazed to behold Neth, the sheepherder, blinking at the bright lights, his wooden face as expressionless as ever.

"Neth!" he cried, advancing.

The latter winked his eyes rapidly, and then grinned broadly.

"Funny we should meet like this," he said, shaking James warmly by the hand. "I come a-hunting after you with a letter from Freedom. 'Specting to hunt all over creation, an' here you be as big as billy-be-damn'."

It was a long speech for the herder. James seized his arm and hustled him into a corner near the end of the bar.

"The letter? What's the news? Anything bad happened?"

Neth, while fishing through his pockets, answered:

"'Bout everything's happened at Kit Carson. General Cook's detectives, some six of 'em, swarmed down on a early morning train and arrested eight men in Carson. Took Scanny, Fram Williams, Ehls and four others. Then they went to work a-digging for stuff the men had hid. Then they took the whole caboodle back to Denver. Letter prob'ly tells you all about it. Lawd, but I'm dry."

James secured the proprietor's attention and bought drinks, both taking beer. Neth's dull face lighted with pleasureable anticipation as he watched the foaming glass being pushed forward. He drained the glass before speaking, and James motioned for it to be refilled. Then the letter was produced and opened and read. Among other things Freedom wrote:

> You should not have pulled out as you did. We shall be much happier if you turn about and come back home. You're more valuable here than in taking over the enforcement of the law. What bad men do in Del Norte needn't concern us so long as they don't steal their stuff up this way. No more stolen goods will go from here to Del Norte. Kit Carson has been cleaned of thieves. Loyal joins me in saying, 'Come home'.

"Girl writ something on the back," mumbled Neth over his glass.

Miss Liberty's words were few, but they gave James a thrill such as he never had experienced before. The message was: "*I'm waiting. Come.*"

James drew a long breath, carefully pocketed the letter and announced—

"I'm riding back in the morning if I can get clear of this place alive."

Neth stared stupidly and repeated—

"Alive?"

James briefly explained his predicament. At mention of the ghost-woman Neth showed some agitation.

"She don't look mortal," he whispered. "Let's clear out tonight."

"I don't think it can be done. I've stuck here almost all day. If I hadn't had the coin marked 15 that I found on one of the sheep stealers, I'd been rubbed out hours ago. I told some of the gang that MacWith gave it to me."

"MacWith? Who is this MacWith?"

"Hush! Not so loud. He's a storekeeper here. He's the head of the whole outfit that's been receiving the loot from Kit Carson and dozen of other places. The ghost-woman is in his store now."

"Well, I snum! Live and learn! Storekeeper a robber! Who'd thought it?"

"Also a murderer. I came here to wind up his ball of yarn."

"You dast do that?" And Neth gaped in amazement. "You'd go gunnin' for the varmint?"

"Why not? Some one must. Only one way to stop him."

"But now you'll start back north and let him slide?"

"Yes. That is if I can get a peek at the store without being killed and fail to find him. Then I'll pull out. But if he is there I'm going to take a fight to him for killing poor Tony and other honest men."

Neth glanced back at the excited group still surrounding the dead soldier. One man was loudly deploring the act and insisting that the soldier's death must be rigidly investigated, warning that his mates would make reprisals all along the upper Rio Grande. Neth whispered:

"Good time now to sneak away if there's a back door. Folks taken up with the dead man."

James instantly realized the sense of this. Even the proprietor had eyes only for the gesticulating group. James led the way to the rear door and opened it. None seemed to observe their departure. The bulk of the town's citizens were in the street in front of the saloon.

"We have a clear road if you'll lead the way," said Neth.

This James was prompt to do. On emerging between two buildings and gaining the front of the store he was disappointed in finding it dark.

"There's a light upstairs," whispered Neth. "But you can't git in to see who's there. If that woman's there I want to keep away."

"The store has a big room behind. I'll walk around to it. You can stay here."

"No. Some one might come along and

bang me on the head. Lead the way. Let's be quick."

James took the lead and the two stood in the rear of the building. The first story was adobe and the second of wood. It was the lower floor that held James' interest, as a light showed at the bottom of the drawn curtain. Neth dropped on his knees, peered in and whispered:

"I can see a man's legs. Must be him."

"Let me look," said James, and he pushed his assistant aside and bent low.

He saw brighter lights than ever flamed in Colorado heavens as he pitched forward, face down. Only his big hat saved him from having his brains dashed out.

If he lost consciousness it was not for long, as some one was still dragging him inside the rear room. He was pushed down a slide that led to the small cellar.

He was lying on his back, trying to remember what it all was about when his senses were cleared by the sound of high pitched laughter. He knew only the death-woman could give way to such risibles. There was something bestial in her weird rejoicing.

"You're smart, dear," James heard a voice saying, and he knew the speaker was the death-woman. "You're clever, but not so clever as I. But you're clever enough to do as I say. Is he dead?"

"I think so. He must be," came the quick, nervous voice of a man. "The clip I gave him would kill an ox."

"You took his gun, of course?"

"Think I'm crazy? Not that he'll ever use one again."

"Then go down and tie him up. I want to talk to him before he leaves us."

"Sarel, you're worse than I am."

"Get down there and tie him up so he can't move head or limb. I'll go with you."

On entering the Del Norte country James had taken to wearing one of his guns on his hip and the other in a shoulder sling under his coat. With benumbed fingers he fumbled at his hip holster. It was empty. He thrust his hand inside his coat and drew a deep sigh of relief as he gripped the .44. Pulling it forth, he held it at his side and turned a bit to conceal it. His feet were touching the bottom of the slip, or chute, down which heavy boxes were slid into the cellar, and down which his own body must have traveled. He was wondering whether the strange couple were coming that way. Then he heard a door open, heard it click behind them, and caught the sound of their feet on stairs not more than a dozen feet from his position.

The man came first, the woman walking behind him and holding a lamp. As they slowly advanced the man's face was in the shadow until the woman stood beside him.

"Neth!" James thought he had said the word to himself instead of speaking aloud.

The man gave a low growl of rage and whipped out a knife, the same he had used in killing the wounded sheep thief. The woman restrained him by clutching his arm and reminding:

"There's plenty of time. He lives. All the better. He can't escape. Did any man ever best you in a knife fight? And he is unarmed."

"Neth, keep back," cried James. "Tell me something before you kill me. Were those letters written by Freedom and his daughter, or are they more of your damnable forgeries, as that bill of sale must have been?"

"The letters are genuine," said Neth. "I was trusted to find you and give them to you because I am a dull, stupid, yet faithful fellow."

"You killed Antonio, the herder?"

"He did, dear," broke in the woman.

"You shot and killed one of your own men near Carson?"

"No, dear, I killed that snake," said the woman, a new note creeping into her voice.

"You made a poor job of it," taunted James. "He was alive when found. It was he who said MacWith is the head of this rotten gang."

Neth, or MacWith, swore under his breath. The woman screamed:

"He lies! He lies! I'll make him say he lies!"

"And you killed the soldier, Neth. The one you brought to town this evening."

"I did. The rat talked too much. You're talking too much. I had the itch to wipe you out when you were at the shack, herding sheep. But it's better this way. I'm going back. I may kidnap the girl and hold her for ransom."

"And you forged that bill of sale for the sheep?"

"Of course."

"You knifed the man to death whom I'd wounded?"

"Naturally. The fool would have talked."

"Tie him up," commanded the woman. "We have lots of things to tell him."

She advanced the lamp. MacWith, with knife ready, moved forward and picked up a club with his free hand. James rolled on his back and threw up the gun. Instantly, almost, MacWith's hand flipped back to hurl the heavy blade. The booming roar of the .44 was deafening in that small enclosure. As James fired he threw himself to one side.

Screaming like a hell cat, the woman raised the lamp and stepped forward to hurl it. She tripped over the feet of the dead man and crashed down on her face. James, afraid of her as he would be of a monster from the nether world, cried out and clambered madly up the slippery slide and fairly hurled himself out the back door.

He ran for a few rods before he could regain control of his nerves. He was sweating from every pore and felt weak and sick. He looked back. The house was very quiet. His fear of the woman surpassed his fear of the man. He wanted to hurry away, but was forced to look back, expecting to see a terrible gaunt shape softly pursuing him. Then he knew she was in the rear room as light showed at the windows. Another glance, and he was realizing that it was not the light of the lamp, but of flames feeding up through the opening in the floor. It was not until then that he remembered that he had heard the cellar door click after the couple had passed through it to descend the cellar stairs.

"Locked themselves in!" he exclaimed.

But the woman was crawling up through the opening, her hair disheveled, the flames playing about her. In one hand she carried the man's revolver. In the other she clutched the big clasp knife, and as she climbed the slippery surface of the slide she stabbed with the knife to hold herself from slipping back into the fiery pit. James believed nothing of earth could harm her. He fled to find deeper darkness.

Next morning he was a dozen miles from the town. He went to Fort Garland to report the murder of the soldier. While resting there, word was received of two bodies being recovered from a store in Del Norte. Then he knew he could ride north and have no fear of monsters following his trail.

When he arrived at the Freedom ranchhouse he said—

"The first you ever wrote me, Lib, and I lost it."

"You talk awfully well, Ben. Ride out to the cattle with me and tell me all about it."

"Gang's broken up. MacWith and the ghost-woman have left the country, never to return. The town of Kit Carson is law abiding. All we have to do is to live and be happy. And that's the subject I want to talk to you about."

"I'm just frantic to hear it, Ben. I know I shall think just as you do."

SMITH LIKES HIS LUMPIA

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

A NIGHT in mid-carnival season—a crowd surging up from the carnival grounds on Wallace Field, heading for the Chinese *pansiterias* in Plaza Santa Cruz, Manila's favorite dining district.

With the crowd go John Smith of the Secret Service and his stout Tagalog wife, Conching. John, an American of the vintage of '99 and one of the "Never Goin' Backs", has learned to appreciate native food. There's a table for them at the Pansiteria Pekin. There always is—for one of his calling. A slippered Celestial takes the orders of the couple. John selects *lumpia ñg pinarito* — chopped shrimp, oysters, pork and cabbage leaves rolled in a flaky crust. Conching calls for *pansit*—something on the order of spaghetti sprinkled with small shrimps. Between the two is placed an immense dish of *bigasse*—polished rice cooked Filipino style in a red clay pot. Small dishes of black *tuyo* sauce flank it.

While John and Conching feast, the detective's eyes rove over the other diners. Many of them are provincials and not a few use their fingers, oblivious to the presence of forks. In a corner an exquisitely dressed woman and her escort make balls of rice with the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand, then snap the balls into their mouths. It takes practice to perform that stunt.

Across the way a group of students display their proficiency in the use of chopsticks and chatter in stilted high school English. Nearby is a sleek looking individual in full native rig. His transparent *camisa Chino* with flapping tails outside his white trousers is of vivid crimson. Beneath it is a black undershirt, marking him as a man from Cainta, where such garments are worn. The man is a *suetic*, a crooked provincial gambler, and as he devours stewed *pusit*, as the Tagalogs term octopus, he watches John. A detective approaching the end of thirty years' service is sure to be known and feared.

And now a buzz of comment runs through the crowd. A group of flashily garbed native girls enter with American sailor escorts.

"*Tingnan mo ang bailarins!*" one hears. "Look at the girls from the cabarets!"

Two are really pretty, but the faces of three others are flat and uninteresting. Beer is immediately ordered and one of the sailors protests when it is served warm. Then comes the familiar chop suey for all hands, the girls insisting on side dishes of *bawang*, a garlic sauce. *Bawang!* Could you imagine it on the breath of a professional entertainer?

John calls for his check and is ready to depart, but Conching demurs. It would be foolish to leave uneaten food on the table. She whispers to the waiter who disappears to return with a banana leaf. Deftly the broken bits and the rice are wrapped up and bound with a strip of banana fiber. Conching takes the bundle and smiles at her American husband.

"All ready now, Juancho," she says. "Our servants will appreciate this food."

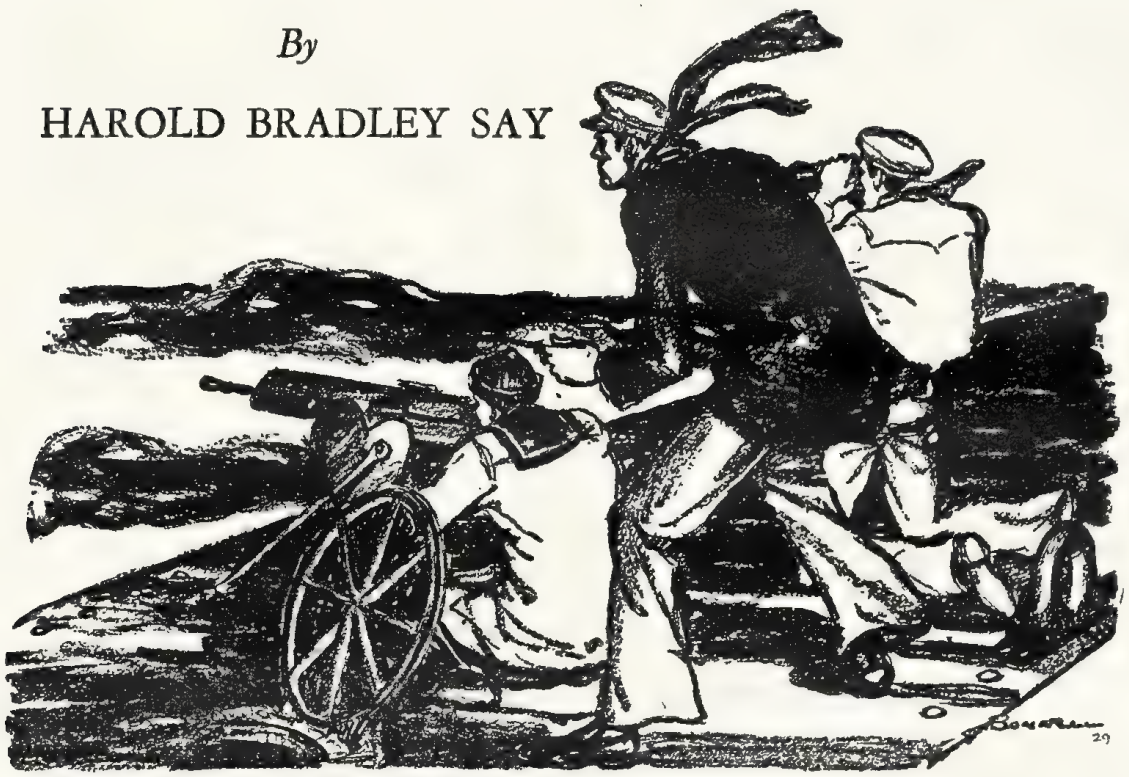
And out in Manila even poorly paid detectives have servants. Yes, and newspapermen as well. Sounds incredible, doesn't it? But it's true.

Read this story and judge whether the bane of a submarine sailor's life is

The BLOOMING MONOTONY

By

HAROLD BRADLEY SAY



DAY WAS all but gone. There was a clammy chillness in the night descending over the North Sea, over the coast of England and on the conning tower bridge of his Majesty's submarine *E-36*. At surface trim the boat slipped rapidly down the shadowy harbor. No sound save the creaming of the water around her nose and the breaking of her wash against the choppy little harbor swells. From open hatches came the musical hum of motors running grouped up.

"Moleshead abeam, sir," droned Lieutenant Davis Fenwick, R. N. R, with an habitual nasal twang.

"Righto," returned Lieutenant-Commander Cartney Wilton. He pulled his muffler tighter and rubbed a hand across a freshly shaven face. He half turned toward the coxswain. "Steer fifty."

"Fifty it is, sir," chanted the coxswain.

Out of the night scarce two ship lengths ahead and off the submarine's starboard bow loomed a massive hulk. No lights on her; no lights on the *E-36*.

Wilton leaped to the edge of the hatch.

"Full astern sta'b'rd!" he shouted down

into the depths of *E-36*. "Hard-a-port!" The coxswain jerked the steering control.

The big shape bore down from ahead. A matter of seconds and its great prow would tear through the steel plates of *E-36* like a knife through an eggshell. A cry from a lookout on the steamer's bow; a screeching blast from her siren. A flashing of lights.

Ponderously slow, like a great beast reluctant to go other than where its nose pointed, the submarine swung to starboard. Almost close enough to touch, the steamer's side slid by the underwater craft. Incoherent shouts from the decks above were drowned in the night. The mountainous bulk was lost in the gloom astern.

"Full ahead sta'b'rd!" Wilton cried down the hatch. "Sta'b'rd the helm." The boat swung back to port.

"Easy now. Easy. Easy. Back on course."

"On course she is," chanted the coxswain.

"Helmsman to the wheel," directed Wilton.

A fourth shape on the bridge moved to the steering wheel. The coxswain without a word dropped down the hatch into a maze of polished levers, shining wheels and twinkling brass of the brightly lighted control room.

E-36 slipped on through the night.

"Bit close, that fellow," commented Wilton casually.

"Aye," replied Fenwick, the navigating officer. "Gave him the jumps no doubt."

Fenwick, a ruddy faced person who seldom wasted words, had been a first mate in the merchant fleet when he had offered his services to the navy. He glanced astern whence the freighter had vanished and his thoughts went back to nights of peace on merchant decks.

Five minutes later Wilton ordered change from motors to Diesels.

"Engines," he called down the hatch. "Three hundred revs."

"Engines," echoed a voice from below. "Three hundred revs."

E-36 was away on her engines at a ten knot clip.

Open water now with an unfriendly, biting wind kicking up choppy little seas that slapped sullenly against the port side of the submarine. Occasionally one struck in such a way as to send showers of salt spray over the little bridge. The boat was down to sea routine with only the captain, navigator and helmsman on the bridge. Now and then a sailor, an engine room artificer or other of the crew, stole up from the humid, lighted depths to snatch a smoke or breath of fresh air. The bite of North Sea winter with a splash of stinging spray sent each quickly back.

"Beastly damned ocean, Fenwick," commented Wilton cheerfully.

"Aye," agreed the navigator. "Knocking about here month on month like a blooming fishing smack gets one. 'Twould be a pleasing change to have to go in the tropics."

"Not in this tin box. Pleasant enough at surface trim. Cooks the life out of a man underneath."

The boat captain glanced at his watch.

"I'll have a bit of a nap now, Fenwick. Cheerio."

The tall figure of the commander disappeared down the hatch. He tarried not to caution his navigator and the helmsman to keep sharp eyes, to call him in emergency. No necessity to direct either to ring a bell if he saw anything. *E-36* had a tried and tested crew. Save for two new first class stokers, every man had been aboard the craft under Wilton for many months.

The captain paused a moment to glance about the control room, where the clatter of the Diesels smothered all other sounds. Some one handed him a cup of cocoa and a biscuit which he leisurely consumed, then moved forward. He walked carefully so as not to disturb men sleeping in hammocks or stretched out on deck. Moments later he was asleep in the little ward room.

Above, Fenwick lighted a pipe and paced back and forth across the narrow

bridge. The helmsman steered in silence.

A faint arm of light moved across the eastern horizon. From right to left, from left to right the beam glided over its arc with a ghostly touch.

"Fritz wastes a lot of current with his toy," grunted Fenwick.

"Aye, sir," returned the helmsman.

E-36 moved on toward the enemy's water.

Wilton's instructions called for two days' patrolling along the enemy's coast and between specific parallels. They also warned him not to go on billet before 9 A.M. as a group of British destroyers were conducting an operation during the night and might not be out of *E-36's* area until that hour.

AT A QUARTER of eight Wilton spotted several faint, penciled lines in the glare of the rising sun. Twelve minutes later a half-dozen vessels were visible two points on the port bow. Possibly the British surface craft returning; more likely enemy vessels running from them. No difference. A submarine was a submarine to friend or enemy and all looked alike from shelling distance. Surface fighters were prone to start shooting quick. Recognition signals could not be relied upon in unexpected meetings.

Wilton frowned sharply. Fenwick regarded his captain questioningly.

Friend or enemy, the ships blurred in the glaring morning sun were coming on full ahead. They had sighted the submarine.

Wilton reached for the Klaxon button. A warning blared out through the bowels of the boat.

"We'll have to dive," he jerked to Fenwick. "Diving stations!"

Eery shouts that were responses to his orders floated up from below.

The helmsman screwed the magnetic compass lid hard home, unshipped the gyrop repeater and scuttled below to continue his steering in the control room.

Fenwick ducked down with a stool, his glasses and sextant.

With a hurried sweep of the watery world about him, Wilton dropped down the hatch, closing the lid after him and screwing the strong back tight into position.

"All ready, sir," Sub-Lieutenant Seaburn, the twenty year old second in command, called out.

"Righto," nodded Wilton. "Flood one and four."

"Open one and four Kingstons and one and four main vents!" barked the sub-lieutenant, who, for all his youth, was a master of his post.

Hands bore down on the Kingston levers and on the vent valves. Coxswains were at the hydroplane and diving rudder wheels.

More commands for flooding two and three. *E-36* canted slightly forward.

Air hissed in the vents; pipes hammered protestingly.

"Ahead switch. Full fields."

The leading torpedo man and another made and broke switches.

The motors climbed up to their full power with a rising hum that became a steady drone. The North Sea closed over *E-36*.

"Eighty feet," called Wilton at the periscope.

Down she started.

"What's she carrying?"

"Five degrees dive for'ard; five degrees rise aft, sir."

Two coxswains glued their eyes on depth gages. The needles moved rapidly forward. Twenty-two—thirty-five—fifty—sixty. *E-36* had not reached her depth when trouble began.

"Helm jammed amidships, sir."

"Seaburn! Oh, Seaburn!" called Wilton. "Helm's jammed. Give it a look-see."

"Propellers approaching," sang out the man at the hydrophone. "Crossing from port to sta'b'rd, sir."

Blam!

Seaburn and others aft were all but knocked from their feet. A line of lights winked out. The concussion within the steel shell was terrific. Ears buzzed and rang. No shouts of excitement.

"Close," jerked Wilton. "Right over the stern. Hundred and twenty."

The diving wheels spun under the coxswains' hands. Deeper went *E-36*.

"Steering gear apparently in order," reported Seaburn evenly. "I think the rudder post gland has tightened."

Blam! Blam!

Two more reverberating shocks almost as severe as the first.

Suddenly men rocked on their feet. *E-36* struck fairly even bottom at one hundred and fifteen feet.

"Never mind the steering gear," directed Wilton calmly. "Shut down everything. Determine if air's escaping. Good guessers, the blighters, or we've got an air or oil leak."

"Propellers nearing again," droned the hydrophone man, "from sta'b'rd to port."

Three more explosions. On the second E-36 quivered violently.

"Seam leaking for'ard, sir," came a voice. "Only slightly."

The boat lay still and ghostly silent. Low conversation, coughs and scraping of feet against steel decking. No undue commotion. Occasionally a glance toward the captain in the control room, standing with hands jammed in his side pockets composedly awaiting the outcome.

"Like as not our own ruddy charges," commented he.

"Aye," agreed Fenwick. "A blooming waste of the king's property.

"Propellers dying out," droned the hydrophone man.

A dirty faced engine room artificer, prone on the deck, raised on an elbow.

"I say, Blinky," he addressed a mate. "I may see that little Winchester miss again."

"Aye? Doun't be too cocky. The scurvy rogues may be persistent. You cawn't tell."

The cook picked his way to the control room.

"A bit of the pressed ham, sir, at noon?" queried he with the concern of an attentive head waiter for his client.

"Righto, Jones," yawned Wilton. "'Pon my oath, I wish I were on a battleship. I'd have a grilled steak. This boiled egg and tinned diet is boresome on the stomach. Anything, Jones, my man; anything."

"No sound of propellers," called the hydrophone watch.

"Good. How about the rudder post gland, Seaburn?"

"I've got the jam," returned the subordinate. "Be clear in a jiffy."

"Good. We'll go up in half an hour."

Wilton sauntered forward. He regarded the leak caused by one of the charges.

"And I suppose the base crowd will grouse about fixing it, eh, Fenwick?"

"Quite like them," returned Fenwick without a smile. "Quite like them."

THE MINUTES dragged by. The command to diving stations, orders for blowing tanks, and holding a depth of eighteen feet. The routine operation of bringing the craft up to observation depth. At this level the lowered periscope would be invisible just beneath the surface.

"Eighteen feet," chanted a coxswain. "Eighteen feet."

Wilton pressed the switch and the long cylinder raised surfaceward. The thin brass tube that was the eye piece of the underwater creature reached up three feet above the heaving ocean. A tense moment, that, when the periscope goes up after a long time down in waters frequented by foes that may fly your own or the enemy's flag. Little talking now. Just undertones and sibilant whispers. Eyes of men at their stations shifted toward Wilton at the periscope. As the tube reached up to daylight they saw his shoulders stiffen. There was a movement of the muscles about his face.

"Steer thirty!" he snapped succinctly. "Steady all. I'm ramming!"

A U-boat's commander saw the Englishman's periscope at the same instant and tried to throw himself out of the other's path. They were too close for torpedo range. Suicide would have been the fate of one had a lucky shot hit the other.

Square between the U-boat's periscopes *E-36* struck. Men were thrown from their feet. The cook, with a pan of sliced meat, went clattering forward along the deck. The boat trembled, twisted slightly to one side. Her stem was deeply imbedded in the German.

Frantically the enemy blew his tanks to make surface before the rushing water drowned him. *E-36's* nose lifted upward. Through the periscope Wilton saw the German's conning tower lift from the sea. Even as the hatch lid opened and a figure clambered out, Wilton counter struck.

"Flood one and two! Lively now! Lively!"

Tons of ocean water surged into the forward tanks, and the weight bore down on the wounded German. Down, down, it sank. A second figure struggled from the hatch and wildly waved a white rag. Too late. The sea surged over the U-boat's conning tower. The man and cloth vanished in the boiling sea. *E-36* canted sharply forward. With her negative buoyancy she started downward with the dying German.

"Blow one and two!" barked Wilton as his own periscope sank beneath the waves.

Air hissed through the manifold. There was a gurgling and boiling in the pipes and tanks. Abruptly she slowed in her downward drop. A jarring and grating forward as her canted nose pulled free of the mortally wounded enemy.

"Two leaks for'ard," called Seaburn. "Not serious."

"Good. Eighteen feet."

E-36 went back up to observation depth.

"The poor beggars," muttered Wilton, working at the eye piece. "Maybe we can pick up the two that crawled out."

"Eighteen feet," called the second coxswain.

Wilton swept the immediate horizon, first rapidly then slowly to pick up anything he had missed.

He lowered the periscope.

"Nothing in sight. Oil on the glass." There was a weariness about him now.

Breaking out of a bottle of champagne was a customary rite when a torpedo got home and decreased the enemy's number by one destroyer, cruiser or other fighting craft.

"How about it, Fenwick? A bottle?"

"Proper, I suppose, sir."

"I suppose. Call Seaburn."

A cork popped. In silence the three raised their glasses and drained the sparkling liquid.

"Dammit," ejaculated Wilton with as much emotion as his subordinates ever saw from him. "Different, you know, binking them with a fish. 'Twouldn't bother me if I had not seen those poor beggars crawling out. Makes one realize there's men in there just the same as here."

"Aye," agreed Fenwick. "A bit of luck he's not breaking out a bottle instead of us. Eh, Seaburn?"

"Quite right," agreed the youthful second in command.

Noon two days later. Sullen gray seas with petulant whitecaps curled in every direction. *E-36* slipped along with the run of the seas. The wind whipped up pieces of ocean and showered it down on the three figures huddled on the conning tower bridge. A thick gray mist hung over the surging water and hemmed in the whitecapped world. It shut off from vision anything two miles distant, and thereby permitted *E-36* to thump along on her Diesels and charge her batteries.

"Hello!" ejaculated Wilton to himself more than to the others on the bridge. He leaned forward and his eyes bored into the mist straight ahead.

Fenwick and the helmsman saw it, too. A dull outline of a sizable surface craft. It was too thick to ascertain the stranger's nature from their distance.

Wilton reached for the telegraph. The Diesels stopped.

"Diving stations!"

Mechanically the helmsman unshipped his gear, secured the compass lid and scurried down the hatch. Behind him scuttled Fenwick and Wilton.

E-36 was hanging on by her vents ready

for a quick descent. She was under water in no time.

"We'll hold course and have a look about in five minutes," said the captain matter-of-factly. "Flood the tubes, Seaburn," he added.

A quick hissing sound in the airlines; a subdued gurgling as water from the fore-trim tanks shot in around the torpedoes ready for unleashing at an instant's notice.

"Firing tanks charged, sir," came Sub-Lieutenant Seaburn's voice from forward. "Tubes flooded."

"Righto." Wilton rested a hand on the periscope elevating device. He glanced at the coxswains. "Eighteen feet—and steady," cautioned he. "Have a care now."

NO HASTE, no noise, no nervousness. Hands rested on wheels and valves with steady touch. No excitement in the glances lifted toward the tall man at the periscope; only a quiet confidence in the faces of the men who knew their captain would do the right thing.

Slowly the periscope stole upward. Intently Wilton held his eyes to the glass. Out of the corner of his mouth flowed a string of comments and orders.

"Freighter. Half ahead. Norwegian flag. Steer forty. Going to stop him for a look-see. Prepare for surface action."

Moments later *E-36* rose three-quarters of a mile away on the port bow of the vessel. Certain neutrals were suspected of carrying forbidden commodities designed for German use. Successful deliveries brought rich reward to their owners and masters. Wilton would determine just what this one's business was.

Out of the submarine's hatch clambered a sailor with a pair of flags.

"Stop for boarding. Send me a boat," Wilton directed the signaler. The flags slashed up and down, spelling out the words.

The answer was a flash of fire from the forward deck of the freighter. Simultaneously the Norwegian flag came down and the German ensign went up. A section of innocent appearing housing had collapsed to the foredeck, leaving two long muzzled guns in open sight. Those on the bridge and little foredeck of *E-36* saw figures hustling about their breeches. Two more flashes.

The first shell screamed through the air well over the submarine. The second pair barely cleared her. Two ugly fountains of water shot upward.

Baited! A trap!

Wilton leaped to the Klaxon button. Those clustered around the deck gun and on the conning tower bridge had anticipated his command, and were scurrying below before the order to submerge was entirely out of Wilton's mouth.

Hatches clanged shut.

"Take her down! Flood the auxiliary. Quick!"

An eternity before the submarine's back was swallowed by the sea. A shell ripped through the superstructure abaft the conning tower. Just as the tower itself started down there came a blinding flash, a sudden reek of explosives, a surging rush of water. Struggling under the drenching stream and choking from powder gas, men got home the inner hatch.

A sailor with a bleeding arm was assisted forward.

"Propellers approaching," sang out the man at the hydrophone. "Small boat, I think."

Almost overhead now.

Blam! Half of the lights went out.

With the suddenness of filling tanks and the lost buoyancy from a flooded conning tower, *E-36* plunged rapidly. Water cascaded through a half dozen small leaks.

"For'ard plane jammed at hard down," called out a coxswain.

"Ten degrees down by the stern," sang out another.

"Sixty feet—seventy—seventy-five—eighty," announced the depth gage reader with a slightly rising note in each successive reading.

Another depth bomb shook the under-

water craft. She went deeper by the stern, though her general plunge was halted. Next came the report that the compressed air service aft had failed. Engine room men struggled with it.

"Get every man who can be spared for'ard," directed Wilton. He next ordered more water in the forward tanks, and full ahead on motors.

The boat leveled off and momentarily held her depth. Water was coming in at an alarming rate from the pressure on leaks, most of which were overhead. A matter of minutes and *E-36* would be leadened down beyond a point of rising through blowing.

"Have to go up," snapped Wilton. "It's fight or drown."

He ordered blowing of the required tanks. *E-36* broke surface. Barely visible two miles away was the steamer; a half mile off was a large motor launch at that moment heading for them at top speed.

E-36 had a machine gun aboard for use in any chance meeting with a Zeppelin. Seaburn and a sailor hurried it out on deck.

Tac-a-tac-tac . . .

The little weapon spat a stream of lead and steel toward the charging launch. On, on it came. Flashes of fire darted from its prow. Its German crew had a small gun firing a deadly little explosive shell. One struck with a reverberating metallic crash. Others kicked up little geysers of water on both sides of the submarine.

Wilton himself leaped to the submarine's deck gun. Coolly he trained the weapon on the speeding boat. He could see men working with a brace of depth bombs on the rear deck of the small craft.

"Fire!"

The cannon jumped back on its recoil.

In a volcano of water and smoke the motor boat ceased to be. Half of it floated for a part of a minute, then vanished below the surface. Several figures struggled around a knot of wreckage.

"Engines!" commanded Wilton. "Three hundred revs. If he hasn't got another boat we've got a chance."

The mist shut off the freighter and *E-36* was alone, ploughing westward.

If she had not been forced to leg it for home on Diesels it is doubtful if her commander would have sighted the half submerged wreckage of a bombing hydroplane just before night. Two figures could be seen on the top wing, feebly trying to signal.

"Maybe they're our people; maybe Germans," spoke Wilton. "No difference. Got to pick them up."

Two hours later when darkness had brought comparative safety to *E-36* banging along on her engines, Wilton picked his way forward to the little niche designated as the ward room.

Two members of the Royal Flying Corps, whose vitality and spirits had come back under warm blankets, dry clothes and generous slugs of king's issue rum, were recounting experiences of their calling in general and of their last eighteen hours in particular.

"A proper straffing we gave the blighters," recounted the pilot. "One of their blooming mine sheds went all over Germany."

"And how the rogues scattered when we opened with the Lewis," went on the other. "We knocked them over like nine pins."

"Quite so, quite so," added his companion. "That's how they put us down. Too low, and they blasted a porthole in one of our petrol tanks. We hoped we could make a landing near a British surface ship. Damned decent of you to come along." He grinned at Wilton.

"Dingey, here," went on flyer No. 1, "has the strangest habit of tossing trifles down on Fritz. Whenever we're going out he takes along old bottles, bricks or shoes. This time he forgot his extras. Can you guess what he did?"

Wilton smiled and shook his head.

"Took off his blooming boots and heaved them over. Positively swears he binked a fat German with one."

For a half hour Wilton listened to the

pair recite experiences. He said little. Over his face came a discontented dismal look that grew deeper as they talked on. He glanced at his watch and said something about going up on the bridge again. He turned to his sub-lieutenant.

"Seaburn," muttered he, "you and I are a pair of doddering asses. Really, we are." He motioned toward the rescued fliers. "These chaps are in the war proper. All the excitement a man needs, a clean bed, baths and all that every day. I've a brother in the cavalry. He sees things, too. A downright donkey I was to take submarines when I could have stayed on battleships! And you—you too chose this tin can service."

"Aye," agreed Seaburn soberly. "I didn't know better. 'Pon my word, sir, it's getting me, too."

The aviator pilot shifted about on Wilton's bunk.

He took in the cramped, noisy tunnel that was the inside of *E-36*.

"Getting you?" repeated he with a glance that swept both navy men. "You mean—nerves?"

"Bless me—no!" exploded Wilton, rising to go aft to the control room. "No, not that. It's the blooming monotony of the thing. Eh, Seaburn?"

The subordinate nodded.

"Exactly, sir. Exactly."

Whereupon the flying man gasped.

FORETELLING THE WEATHER BY WILD LIFE

By HARRY P. WHITE

WHEN you hear kildees calling at night or see them circling around and uttering their vociferous call the weather will change in less than twenty-four hours.

When you see blacksnakes moving during the summer it portends rain.

Treefrogs are accurate barometers. They will feel a change of a degree in humidity and start up their croaking.

During the winter, if you see crows in large flocks flying high and heading for their roosts early in the afternoon, look out for colder weather and high winds.

When you see juncos and sparrows in large numbers busily feeding look out for sleet or snow.

If while out hunting you jump a great many hares from their forms the next day will most surely be a rainy one.

If you hear night herons calling during the night or see the great herons flying from one pond to another you may expect a long period of rainy weather.

Horned owls calling in daytime indicates a change of weather—rain or snow.

The day before a snowstorm, if hunting, you will find much more game, especially quail. They are busy feeding; they know what is coming.

We White Men

A Story of Siam

By CLARK BROCKMAN

NAI YON DA ALARÇON walked down the narrow hall on the third floor of the Great Swatow Rice House, the largest Chinese hotel in Bangkok. He paused before Room 16 and knocked—two quick raps with his knuckles, a single rap, then a dull thud with his wrist. There was no answer. A smile of satisfaction lighted his handsome face as he stepped into the room. Without a moment's hesitation he selected the armchair before the window—the chair which was a full inch higher than the other two, the chair which indicated that its occupant was of superior rank to all others in the room.

He had been waiting but a few minutes when he heard a furtive step in the hall.

The door knob moved. Nai Yon straightened himself quickly. When the door opened he was nonchalantly studying his polished nails.

A Siamese official stepped hurriedly into the room. At first glance the official gave the impression of being a yellow Napoleon, but closer observation dissipated the illusion. He was a man of forty, the contour of whose form and features did resemble those of the great Bonaparte, but his rotund body was soft from high living.

Dark circles hung under his piercing black eyes. He was dressed in the conventional white military coat and blue silk *panung* of a Siamese gentleman. A wide black band on his left arm indicated that he was still in mourning for the late king. Clamped to the edge of his pocket was the gold emblem of a life member of the Siamese Red Cross.

A dark frown swept over the features of the official. Nai Yon continued the inspection of his nails for a moment before glancing up. As he suspected, the man in the doorway was Pia Grude, one of the most important noblemen in the kingdom, one of the favorites of the late king, the leader of the opposition to the new régime. Nai Yon nodded with exaggerated casualness.

Beneath his calm exterior his every nerve was tense. Nai Yon knew that he was playing a dangerous rôle. He was snubbing his greatest benefactor for the one thing he desired more than wealth and comfort—respect. He wanted to be treated as a white man is treated.

Nai Yon appeared to be a tall, well built Spaniard in his early thirties, but he was Eurasian—Eurasian in a part of the world where a halfcaste is an outcast. In fact, he could not justly claim to be even a halfcaste. His father's genealogy led back through devious paths in a hundred seaports and even his mother was half Chinese and half Siamese.

His advantages, his opportunities, had been nil. But in him had cropped out that indomitable pride of Old Captain Manuel—Captain Manuel da Alarçon of Pizarro's army. He had lifted himself by his boot straps until he was able to make a comfortable though questionable living. He carried himself like a graduate of Sandhurst. His head caught that haughty poise which the British consul general had made famous in Bangkok. He spoke with a British accent. Many of his ilk envied him, called him successful.

Yet Nai Yon had stinted himself, had been almost miserly. For twelve years he had been struggling toward a goal. That goal was Singapore—Singapore, where he could be a respected citizen; Singapore, where with enough money he could make a good start; Singapore, where Kam Keo, the Eurasian girl he had loved since childhood, was waiting for him.

But Singapore was a means to an end. What he wanted most was respect, self-respect and the respect of others. Pia Grude had furnished him money. Practically every satang of Nai Yon's considerable bank account had come from him. The one thing he had never received from Pia Grude was respect. The official treated him with the same condescension which he would bestow on any Eurasian. Before each interview Nai Yon had determined to assert himself, lost courage at the last moment, failed. This time he had screwed his courage to the sticking point.

Pia Grude's actions seemed to indicate that he did not notice Nai Yon's impudence, but the first word he uttered brought Nai Yon to his feet. Pia Grude had used "*tan*", the pronoun used only to inferiors.

Before Nai Yon had time to retort a Chinese menial entered the room, bowed obsequiously to Pia Grude, placed on the table a bottle of Haig and Haig, four bottles of soda and two glasses, bowed again to Pia Grude, backed to the door and closed it behind him. Nai Yon had been completely ignored. It cut his hypersensitive pride to the quick.

A faint smile toyed with the heavy lips of the nobleman. He tore the foil from the bottle.

"Lock it," he said, indicating the door with a decisive jerk of his bullet-like head.

As Nai Yon hesitated he drew a large roll of bills from his pocket. The crisp notes curled and twisted on the polished table as though they were alive.

Nai Yon stared at them, shrugged his shoulders, sighed. His Sandhurst attitude was noticeably absent as he walked to the door. He was turning the key when he had a feeling that something was wrong. He turned quickly to find that Pia Grude had slipped his plump figure into the armchair. Nai Yon scowled, thrust his hands into his pockets and leaned against the door as though he intended to stand during the interview.

The official appeared to ignore him. He poured the drinks, then counted two thousand ticals with quiet deliberation. He indicated a chair with a graceful gesture of his plump ring bedecked hand.

"Sit down," he said with seeming cordiality.

Nai Yon had noted every curl of each crisp note. He realized that Pia Grude was planning something of importance. Two thousand ticals would bring him materially nearer his goal. He decided that the wisest plan was to listen to the official's proposal, shrugged his shoulders again and dropped into the chair indicated.

Pia Grude raised his glass.

"To the late king—he was a real man!"

Nai Yon raised his glass without enthusiasm, but drank thirstily.

Pia Grude poured a stiffer drink for him before saying—

"That is advance payment on the ten thousand—"

Nai Yon caught his breath. Ten thousand ticals! With what he had saved it would be enough, enough to get his start in Singapore.

Pia Grude had paused. He continued—

"It is advance payment on the ten thousand I will give you when the little service is completed."

The nobleman watched Nai Yon's hungry eagerness. The Eurasian leaned forward, his eyes shining, his hands moving nervously. He made as if to take the money. Pia Grude placed his chubby hand heavily on the pile of bills.

"Wait," he said.

Nai Yon drained his glass.

The nobleman's eyes narrowed.

"Let me tell you how you are to earn the money. You have been asked to act as interpreter for the American photographer. Tomorrow the king will ask him to go to Chiengmai to take a cinema of the new white elephant. It seems that his Majesty and Mr. Finley were quite intimate in Europe. You are to agree to go. Before you return the white calf must die. That is all. The eight thousand will be waiting for you when you return." He shoved the pile of bills across the table.

Slowly Nai Yon withdrew his hand. As he stared silently at the table his shoulders bent as if under some heavy weight. His head dropped forward until he lifted his forearm and rumpled his thick black hair with his fingers. Abruptly he stood up, shot a glance at the official, then paced the narrow floor.

"You hesitate?" queried Pia Grude in dulcet tones. "Your life's ambition gained for the killing of a mere elephant!"

"He's not a mere elephant. He's a god! His birth shows that Buddha approves of the new king. He's the representative of Buddha. Some say he is the Buddha himself!"

"*Maa!*" sneered the official.

"Oh, I'm not fool enough to believe it, but the people in Bangkok have gone wild over the birth of this calf. The new king is extremely popular in spite of what you—and I," he added quickly, "think about him. The people believe that Prince Assadang did not want the throne but took it because he was told it was his patriotic duty. Up there in the jungle the calf is in truth a god. One suspicion of what I was doing and it would mean the finish, as far as I am concerned."

He stood with his hands on the table and leaned forward. His eyes held those of the official.

"And furthermore, Pia Grude, I do not imagine for a moment that the killing of

the calf ends the matter. You are still planning to get your clique into power again. After the white elephant, it will be the king himself!"

"So you are one of them!" sneered the nobleman. "You desert the standard of his late Majesty! You would have this invalid brother usurp the throne!"

"I have no love for the new king," growled Nai Yon. "It is not that. You know it. To do as you wish is suicide. I am not ready for such a step. Not yet!"

"Then you refuse?"

"Under the circumstances, yes."

Pia Grude leaned back in his chair. He spoke as if to himself.

"Many people would be glad to know why the Chow Luang died so suddenly."

"I killed him for you," blurted Nai Yon.

"You can prove nothing while I can prove anything," continued Pia Grude casually. "Before the late king's death the *rajanee* lost some valuable jewelry."

"But you have it—at least I gave it to you. You planned the robbery."

"You can prove nothing. I can prove anything. Your word is not worth the dirt scraped from the hind foot of a pariah dog."

NAI YON dropped into his chair, helped himself to four fingers of whisky and swallowed it neat. Pia Grude watched him with steady black eyes.

"You will kill the white elephant. The people in the jungle will be led to believe that he was killed by the spirit of the camera. The rest of the country will know—or be made to know—that his death shows the disfavor of Buddha. Should the king die suddenly it will be further proof of Buddha's disfavor. There is the money."

"I will have nothing to do with a plot against the life of the king." Nai Yon spoke with unmistakable conviction.

Pia Grude leaned over the table and shook a chubby finger at the Eurasian.

"I don't want you to have anything to do with it. That has been arranged. You will still be in the jungle when it happens." His soft voice changed to a snarl. "But if you return without killing the white elephant you will be forced into things which *will* throw suspicion on you —more than suspicion!" he added significantly. "There's the money. You will probably leave tomorrow. Collect what implements you need. I leave it entirely in your hands. Choo will go as your assistant. You might employ him as cook. I told him to report to you at midnight for instructions."

Pia Grude unlocked the door, peered out cautiously and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

Nai Yon sat as one stunned. He had dreamed that Singapore was within sight but had awakened to find death staring him in the face. He hated the very thought of death. He was terrified by the great unknown.

He cursed the accident of his birth. He cursed himself. He cursed the evil fate that had made him a tool of these regicides. Beneath his crust of pride and egotism he knew that he was a tool. Struggle, object, curse as he might, he was still the servant—the slave. Pia Grude's threat had not been an empty boast. He, Nai Yon, could be jailed, executed or murdered and it would be a mere incident in the official's daily routine.

Nai Yon had been sitting at the table with his head in his hands. He threw his arms above his head, his fists clenched. From his lips came the cry:

"I'm white! By God, I'm white! That nigger can't do it! The nigger can't!"

Gradually the indisputable facts in the situation took on their relative importance. He might kill the white calf and fool the jungle people. He could not fool Pia Grude. To attempt to expose the plot would be useless. He knew his word was worth nothing.

Under the circumstances the advisable plan was to poison the calf, collect his money and get to Singapore without delay. It was the lesser of the two risks and offered the greater reward.

But death at the hands of the jungle

people would be cruel. He would have to devise a scheme that would fool them. He poured himself another drink, pulled a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket and concentrated on the problem before him. He would have to fool the elephant as well as the natives. Later he realized that he would have to fool Finley too.

Finally he hit upon a plan which he believed would succeed. To make doubly certain, he determined to try it on a young elephant before he tried to poison the white calf. He wrote on the paper a list of the things he needed, picked up the bottle which still contained some of the golden liquid and left the hotel. It was after eleven. He would have to hurry.

It was only a few blocks to the second hand shops. He first bought a set of the slender, peculiarly curved paring knives which Siamese ladies use in carving fruit and vegetables into the shapes of flowers when they are preparing for a feast. He then purchased a dozen yellow rubber tubes which were made for balloons. At a drug store he purchased two packages of a new surgeon's thread which dissolved in a few hours. At a fruit store he purchased a dozen bananas, then called on the proprietor of an opium den near the covered bridge. Nai Yon knew him well and had no difficulty in getting all the little lead tubes he desired.

He returned to his furnished room in an old two-story residence at the end of the blind alley which joins New Road just below Nai Lert's, turned on the electric light, placed his purchases on his desk and pulled down the shades.

With one of the little knives he carefully cut a plug of irregular shape from a banana. With another he made a deep cavity in the center, filled one of the balloons with as much water as could be held in two of the lead tubes, tied the open end with the surgeon's thread and worked it gently into the cavity. He then replaced the plug and smiled with evident satisfaction.

He was sure it would work. The elephant, he believed, would not taste it as the banana would not be thoroughly chewed and the loosely filled rubber tube would probably hold until the thread dissolved.

Nai Yon was dreaming of the life he would lead in Singapore when a soft voice close to his ear said—

"*Mah liao*, I have come."

The unexpected voice almost brought the Eurasian from his chair, but his spasm of fear lasted for only the fraction of a second. Grasping his long heavy ruler, he rose slowly. Not until he had attained his Sandhurst posture, not until his head had assumed that haughty tilt, did he turn upon the man who had spoken. It was Choo, known to his intimates as The Shadow.

Nai Yon was not a bully of the worst description, but his subconscious mind realized that here was a fellow before whom he could play the white man. His soul craved the chance to pay some one in the coin with which he would have liked to settle his score with Pia Grude.

Choo cringed. He shifted the big wad of betel nut, lime and tobacco so that it bulged the hollow cheek on the other side of his face. Some of the brick red juice oozed from the corner of his ugly, misshapen mouth. Even as he cringed his attitude was one of supple grace. From infancy he had been trained to take female parts in *lacons*. He was well built in a delicate way with the shapely arms and legs of a girl. His hands were slender, his fingers tapered. He had been a favorite with the rabble in the pit until his hideous mouth had lost him even their undiscriminating support. The noiseless glide with which he had made so many applauded entrances and exits had gained him the sobriquet of The Shadow. Many of his new associates in the underworld hnew him by no other name.

But Nai Yon knew him well and hated him. He was the personification of all that Nai Yon was trying to live down. The Eurasian spoke with the vehemence of an outraged clerk in a British store. He even garbled his Siamese.

"Offspring of generations of fathers and mothers of mangy pariah dogs—face like the heel of a foot—how dare you sneak in on a gentleman? Have I not told you to knock before entering my room? Have I not ordered you to wear shoes when working for me?"

He slashed the ruler across the native's back. The overt act of authority went to his head like drink. He was crazed by his lust for respect. The ruler flashed with repeated strokes. Before the Eurasian was through the native was bleeding about the head and his thin cotton jacket had been all but torn from his back.

Nai Yon stood up panting.

"Now, do you know how to treat a gentleman?" he demanded.

Choo was the personification of brow-beaten servility.

"*Krahp*—yes," he whined.

Nai Yon cursed in English after the British mode of profanity. Not until he had completely unburdened his soul did he give Choo his instructions.

"Buy a third class ticket for Chiengmai. Find out what train we are taking and board it. Don't speak to me until I recognize you. Go! Wait! If you are not wearing shoes the next time I see you, you will never come back from the jungle. Now, get out!"

Choo seemed to glide across the floor. The door appeared to open before his hand touched the knob. He was gone without a sound.

Nai Yon stood long before the mirror of his chiffonier. He was proud of himself. At least one "nigger" had learned some respect for white men.

THE NEXT evening Albert J. Finley, the American news reel photographer, dropped his one hundred and forty pounds upon the soft cushions of his first class compartment.

"An excellent dinner, Nai Yon. And to think that we ate it in a modern dining car in the jungles of Siam!"

He pulled his cigaret case from his pocket and offered it to the Eurasian.

Nai Yon helped himself, flashed his pocket lighter and held it for Finley. It was the fifth cigaret Finley had offered him since they had started their trip—the fifth cigaret in the course of a single afternoon. And Finley had accepted two from him. For the first time in his life Nai Yon knew what it was to have a white man treat him as an equal; not only as an equal but as a friend.

In Siam the offering of a cigaret is an act of the utmost significance. It is a bid for friendship. Nai Yon did not suspect for a moment that it meant nothing to Finley, that Finley probably did not realize he was doing it. Nai Yon was hungry for friendship, starving for want of friendship. He responded wholeheartedly.

Finley had done more than offer him cigarets. He had invited Nai Yon to dinner. The Eurasian would never forget that invitation. Already he could repeat it in Finley's short, crisp manner with just the trace of an American twang. Some day when he was socially accepted he would phrase his invitation as Finley had phrased it. He repeated it for the hundredth time under his breath. "Let's eat."

Since Finley had offered him the first cigaret Nai Yon had studied his every move. Although he had lived in Bangkok most of his life he knew nothing about Americans. Most of the Americans in the city were missionaries. They did not need interpreters and his questionable pursuits did not bring him in contact with them. To him it was a new breed of white man.

He studied every detail of Finley's appearance; his blond hair, his blue eyes, his delicate, aristocratic features, his slight build. He noted that Finley did not wear shorts, that he wore a white sack suit and not one cut on military lines. He noted that Finley spoke with a decisive crispness which was almost abrupt, that he was interested in everything, that he never stopped asking questions although many of the questions showed an almost childish ignorance of things Siamese.

He noted that Finley was not ashamed to show his enthusiasm for the progress

Siam was making and that he spoke in glowing terms of things at which other white men had scoffed. His vocabulary was quite different. Nai Yon tried to remember the different words but they came too fast for him.

When they arrived in Chiengmai luck seemed to be using her good graces in Nai Yon's behalf. The governor had made arrangements for them to spend a day in the city and overtake the carriers at Ban Pin the following night. That gave Nai Yon a day to experiment with his poison on an elephant calf Choo had located soon after their arrival. Finley had agreed to employ Choo as cook, which assured Nai Yon of The Shadow's help on the trip.

Nai Yon was so elated he invited Finley to take some pictures of the calf, as that would make the test conditions almost identical with those under which he would have to work with the white elephant and would make more plausible the story he would tell about the spirit in the camera killing the calf. Finley was eager to go.

Nai Yon spent a good part of the night preparing his bananas, rose early to get the carriers started and then called for Finley at the residence of William Smyth, the florid and burly manager of the Farther India Teak Corporation, with whom Finley was staying. They drove to the village near which the elephants were foraging. Nai Yon found a guide.

A half hour's walk along a trail through dense jungle brought them to the bank of a stream. They could hear the cracking and crashing of green branches before they saw the elephants. The mother was feeding at the edge of a clearing which offered sufficient light for Finley to take his pictures. Without stopping for Finley to choose his position Nai Yon hurried forward.

"Is the mother vicious?" asked Nai Yon.

"No," the guide assured him. "She is quite used to having people feed the calf. The interest in elephant calves seems to have taken a great jump since the white elephant was born. Even this dark calf has been stuffed until his owner feared that he would be killed. That is why he sent the mother and calf out here to the jungle. Few people come out here to see him."

Nai Yon pulled the paper from his half dozen bananas and offered one to the baby elephant. The calf took it in his trunk, turned it awkwardly until it reached his mouth, then ate it hungrily. Nai Yon offered him another and another. The gears of the camera clicked rhythmically as Finley made his tests. The calf ate another—four. Nai Yon could hardly disguise his excitement. His plan was obviously succeeding!

"Let me feed him," called Finley.

Cold shivers ran up Nai Yon's spine. He could not let Finley touch the bananas. The holes had been made with the greatest of care but that was tempting Providence too far. He offered the fifth one before the calf had finished the fourth. The young elephant took it in his trunk, dropped it as he tried to shove it into his mouth. He fumbled for it, could not get it off the ground. Finley was already across the clearing.

"Let me give him the last one."

"No! A—ah—uh—get back please! These elephants are not used to white men. The mother might become frightened and charge you. Please stand back!"

"Don't be foolish!" Finley was obviously annoyed. "Let me give him the last one."

"But it's true, sir. These animals are friendly enough to natives, but they are suspicious of white men."

Nai Yon spoke hurriedly. He had forgotten his British accent.

"But you look as much like a white man as I do."

Nai Yon's jaw dropped. He *was* a white man. For years he had been fighting to prove that very point. He had convinced himself that he was really white. Could he renounce his blood even in this emergency? Could he claim to be native? Could he tell Finley, this man who had treated him like an equal, this

white man who in two short days had become his ideal, could he tell him that he was native? Yet could he run the risk of letting Finley know that he was poisoning the calf? If he did, when the white elephant died Finley would undoubtedly put two and two together. And Finley was the king's personal friend.

"I'm part native," he exclaimed in desperation.

Immediately he regretted it. If he had only had time to think he could have found some way out of the dilemma.

"Give me the banana," demanded Finley.

"I'm afraid!" Nai Yon held the banana to the calf, who took it. He stood up facing Finley. "I was afraid you might be hurt."

Finley growled—

"I can take care of myself."

They rode back to the city in silence.

That afternoon Finley developed his film and went to the club with Smyth. Nai Yon returned to his room in a Chinese hotel and waited—waited for news of the calf. Choo had employed one of his former colleagues to watch for the results of the test. Nai Yon dared not leave his room. As the hours dragged by it assumed the nature of a cell. He was incarcerated until this man came with the news which would release him—release him either elated or discouraged. But he had to know the outcome before he left for the jungle.

He feared that he had failed, yet every step in the hall brought back confidence, raised him to the point of elation until as the steps passed his door he sank into even greater depression. Finally he went to bed but could not sleep. He rolled and tossed. Each minute seemed an hour.

IT WAS not until four o'clock that the steps stopped at his door. He held his breath. The two raps followed by a rap and a thud were made gently. He hurried to the door, opened it.

A dark figure whispered:

"The dark calf was ill at sunset. He died at midnight."

Nai Yon pushed some money into the man's hand and closed the door. He was elated. His plan had succeeded. He pounded his fist into his open palm.

"And it will succeed!" he muttered.

At six o'clock he was at Smyth's residence. Finley was waiting. They climbed into the car and were ready to ride to their horses at the end of the macadam road when an excited native rushed up.

"Nai Smai, Nai Smai," he shouted to Smyth, "they have killed the elephant. They killed the calf yesterday!"

Nai Yon's heart stopped. The native continued his accusations.

"What's the matter?" asked Finley.

"The beggar claims that you killed his elephant yesterday. Poison, he says." The Britisher laughed. "Cheerio! Good luck! I'll attend to this blighter." He turned to the driver. "*Bai*—go!"

The car rolled out of the compound. They rode to the end of the highway in silence. Instead of firing an interminable barrage of questions Finley hardly made a comment. Nai Yon wondered. Left alone with his thoughts, his guilty conscience, his fears, he was worried. He wondered if Finley suspected, if he knew, if one of the friends of the king had warned him.

When they arrived at the end of the road the horses were ready. They rode on, again in silence. During the long hot day Finley appeared to be keenly interested in everything but said nothing. Nai Yon was more worried. Did Finley know of his previous record? What did Finley think of his strange actions the morning before? Had the untimely arrival of the elephant's keeper started Finley on that dangerous arithmetical problem of putting two and two together? Didn't the unnatural silence prove that Finley had changed his attitude toward him? After all, what was Finley thinking about?

The last question was partially answered immediately after supper. They

had found the carriers at the temple in Ban Pin. It was an ancient building sitting in dilapidated grandeur on a high promontory which thrust itself into a sharp bend of a tributary of the Meping. The dense jungle crowded it close at the back, but the spacious courtyard in front of the temple was bare even of grass and as flat as a table. The venerable palms which surrounded it and fringed the edge of the bluff raised their feathery heads high above the broken spire of the temple. A storm was brewing and across the river a wide bamboo grove rocked, waved and billowed in the breeze. The tufted heads of coconut palms floated like anchored buoys on the green liquid surface.

Supper was ready when they arrived. They ate on a table in the courtyard. When the dishes had been cleared away Finley offered Nai Yon a cigaret, leaned across the table and said—

"Nai Yon, what's the real significance of a white elephant?"

The question was so sudden, so unexpected, Nai Yon had the sensation of being hit suddenly. He inhaled too deeply, gagged, began coughing. He could hardly speak.

"Wh—what did you say?"

"What is the real significance of a white elephant?" repeated Finley. "Why is it important? How important is it? How did it get that way?"

Nai Yon tried to persuade himself that the questions were natural enough for a person who was visiting Siam for the first time, for a person who was on his way to take pictures of the elephant, but did not succeed. A man who was a friend of the king ought to get that information from the king himself or from some official in a position to speak with authority. Nai Yon felt almost certain that Finley had been told to watch him, that Finley's former friendliness had been a mere gesture to gain his confidence. But Nai Yon was not ready to show his hand. He would stay in the game.

"I will answer your last question first," he said.

He tried to talk naturally as he had while answering Finley's other questions. As he spoke he studied the white man's every feature, looking for a sign which would tell more than words.

"In ancient times the princes in this part of the world gained their reputations in hand to hand combat much as the knights did in Europe. There was one marked difference. Their steeds were elephants. Each prince led his own army, met the opposing prince in single combat. The success of the day was usually decided by the outcome of this fight.

"Of course much depended on the elephant. A good charger could often win the day for a poor fighter. To gain a psychological advantage the chargers were decked out in the most hideous and fearful war paint. Anything unusual or unnatural was considered a tremendous advantage. For this reason a white elephant, no matter what his size, was supposed to be far superior to any other as a charger.

"Their reputation became so great that no prince was satisfied until he had one. A prince often picked a quarrel with a neighbor for the sole purpose of taking his white elephant from him. The result was that any one who could keep a white elephant was by necessity more powerful than his neighbors. One of the kings of Siam styled himself The Master Of Five White Elephants.

"Legends grew up around the white elephant. It was said that a man was powerful because he owned the elephants, although in reality he owned the elephants because he was powerful. Some brilliant priest asserted that the white elephant was an omen from Buddha which showed that he approved of the king. More legends arose. It was finally established that there would be a white elephant born in the kingdom every time a new king came to the throne if that new king had the approval of Buddha. Of course, in Siam a king must have the approval of Buddha. When Prince Assadang came to the throne he had to have a white elephant. Without it he might reign by

might, but never because of the loyalty of his subjects. I believe I have answered all three of your questions."

FINLEY had listened intently, but betrayed none of the signs for which Nai Yon was watching.

"I imagine," he said, "that they take the greatest care of an animal that is so important to the welfare of the nation. It would be a calamity if anything should happen to it, would it not?"

The American was disconcertingly innocent. If he knew, or even suspected what was afoot, he was a supreme actor. Nai Yon could not tell, but the questions were too pertinent to leave much room for doubt. Again Nai Yon cursed Pia Grude, cursed the accident of his birth, cursed himself. He wanted to keep the respect of this white man, this first white man to treat him like a human being. But his life was at stake, and his life's ambition—a respectable life in Singapore with Kam Keo. He had to play the game through to the end.

"No," he lied, "it would not be a calamity. The mortality among baby elephants is high. If it is the will of Buddha, the calf dies."

"But if the calf is the mark of Buddha's favor, will the calf die?"

"Do you believe, then, that this calf was sent by Buddha?" Nai Yon's incredulity was sincere.

The American laughed.

"Of course not. But the people are Buddhist and, after all, they are the ones to consider. I do not suspect for a moment that the king believes in the tradition. I knew him when he was a student at the Sorbonne. He is a very intelligent man, but he must keep up the show to gain the confidence of his subjects. Changes, reforms must come slowly. If the people believe it, as far as they are concerned it is so."

"Perhaps, but these 'niggers' are so superstitious, so ignorant, so terribly ignorant. They are impossible!" Nai Yon spoke with a bitterness which he felt, a bitterness greater even than that of an intolerant European.

"Not as bad as that," Finley chided. "They have a long way to go, but they are making astounding progress. I, for one, will not believe that they are impossible. I am determined to do anything I can to assist the king to carry out his plans for the country. We white men must help the natives, not thwart them in their efforts to do better."

No eavesdropper would have thought for a moment that Finley included Nai Yon in his "we white men," but the Eurasian caught it, clutched it to his heart. This white man had included him as a member of the "superior" race. Finley himself had said it!

But hidden under that recognition, that compliment, Nai Yon found a veiled threat. At last he was positive that Finley not only suspected but knew.

"I am determined to do all that I can to assist the king."

In the light of the preceding conversation that could mean but one thing—Finley would prevent Nai Yon from carrying out his designs of killing the white elephant.

The first drops of the long expected storm splashed on the table. Finley rose and stretched.

"Let's turn in. I'm tired. I'm not used to an all day ride. Good night." He walked into the dim temple.

Nai Yon was tired. Of a sudden he felt more tired than he had ever been. But his mind was too active to permit sleep. This American, this white ideal, blocked his way to success. If Finley knew, as Nai Yon believed he did, it was useless to continue with his plan. Even if he should succeed in killing the white calf he would not have a chance of escaping alive.

He paced the courtyard. The drops were falling faster. Lightning flashed on the stately palms. Thunder crashed overhead. Nai Yon was oblivious to it all. Everything for him depended upon the successful completion of the task assigned him. He could see only one way

out. He sank down in his chair, his head in his hands.

Words that Pia Grude had whispered to him months before kept drumming in his ears—

"The lips of the dead are sealed."

He had killed before. The Chao Luang was not the only one either. He had killed before and had not had a single qualm of conscience. One native more or less made no difference, but he could not bring himself to raise his hand against this white man. He fervently wished that Finley were dead, that he were no longer the insurmountable obstacle to his goal, but he felt limp the moment he thought of committing the murder.

The storm burst with sudden fury. He was drenched to his skin. A gentle hand touched his shoulder.

"The Nai is getting wet." It was Choo's voice. "Shall I move the chair to the porch?"

"No," growled Nai Yon.

"The plans have gone wrong?" whispered Choo. "Nai Finley knows?"

"Get out, damn you!" barked Nai Yon in crisp English. "*Bai*," he added in Siamese.

Choo bent closer and whispered hurriedly.

"Pia Grude sent me prepared for this very emergency. He was afraid it might happen thus. Go to bed, Nai Yon. Sleep peacefully. Choo, The Shadow, is your servant."

Nai Yon looked up.

The Shadow had melted into the blackness. There was a flash of lightning. The courtyard was as bright as midday, but The Shadow had gone.

Nai Yon had been roused. After the heat of the day the cold rain chilled him. He hurried to the porch. As he reached the top step the soft coaxing notes of a native musette came from the back of the temple. He recalled that Choo had learned snake charming since leaving the stage.

"Cobra!" he breathed.

The diabolical efficacy of Pia Grude's plan was clear. Choo could glide into the temple without disturbing a cricket and slip the cobra under Finley's mosquito net. In a few hours Finley's lips would be sealed. His death would be so obviously an accident of the jungle that an explanation would not even be necessary. With Finley out of the way it would be an easy matter to poison the white calf and earn his money.

The musette was still coaxing. In the darkness Nai Yon saw Pia Grude in that private room of the Chinese hotel. He was saying, "If you return without killing the white elephant, you will be forced into things which will throw suspicion on you—more than suspicion!" The picture faded.

He saw the beautiful face of Kam Keo. She was smiling, that confident, winning smile, the smile he had last seen the night before she left for Singapore. They were together on the royal landing in Bangkok. She was leaning against him. He could feel the warmth of her body. She was saying, "See how the moon turns the pagodas of Wat Aroon to silver. And see how that silvery path leads straight from the temple to our feet. It is an omen, my beloved. You will tread a silvery path to the temple where I shall be waiting."

The desire to be with Kam Keo was even more effective than the threat of death made by Pia Grude. He leaned against the wall. A heavy bamboo carrying pole slipped, but he caught it before it clattered to the brick floor. He gripped it. The weight of the formidable weapon led his mind to thoughts of violence.

Why should Finley not be killed? After all, the American was but a mere man like the Chao Luang and the others whose lives he had taken. The more he thought of the problem the more it seemed that Fate had ordained that it should be so. Fate had made him an outcast, an object of scorn for white men. Fate had brought him and Finley from opposite sides of the world and placed them in this situation where it was a question of the life of one or the other. And furthermore, Fate had given him

Choo to do the job for him. The thought eased his mind and exhilarated him. Fate had ordained the death of Finley.

The soft coaxing notes of the musette ended in a long tenuous wail. Nai Yon knew that The Shadow had secured the snake.

The heavy pounding of his heart changed its cadence. The staccato beats of exultation changed to the labored throbs of doubt.

Nai Yon's thoughts turned again to Finley; Finley, the first white man to treat him as an equal and as a friend. Finley was his ideal. In the barest fraction of a second the innumerable gracious acts of Finley flashed before him. Again he heard Finley say, "We white men . . ."

Nai Yon clutched the heavy carrying pole.

"I am white!" he cried. "By God, I'm white!"

Again he saw the sinister face of Pia Grude threatening death. Again he saw the face he loved. Nai Yon weakened.

"I'm white," he pleaded. "We're both white, Kam Keo."

There was a flash of lightning. Again the courtyard was as bright as day. The Shadow was coming up the steps. The white light made his hideous features even more grotesque. His fingers gripped the scaly body of a cobra just back of its broad flat head. He wore no shoes.

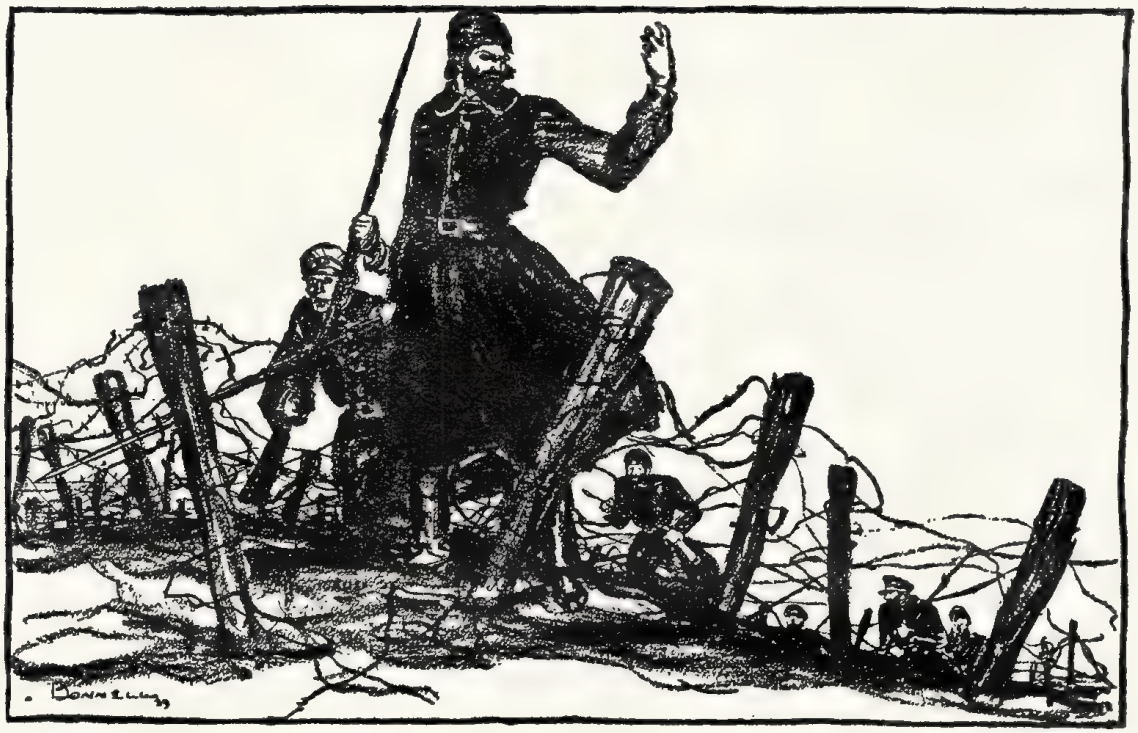
Before Nai Yon was the personification of what he had spent his life trying to live down. Lying asleep in the temple was the personification of what he had spent his life trying to attain. The heavy carrying pole swung over his shoulder and descended.

"You damn' native!" he growled. "We white men—"

There was another flash of lightning. Choo was prostrate on the brick floor. Deep in his brown neck were the fangs of the cobra.

Nai Yon leaned limply against the door.

"We white men," he murmured. "We —white—men."



UNCONSCIOUS

An uproarious letter from a devoted American husband who joined the Russian Army

By FRANK J. SCHINDLER

Somewhere in Russia, which is a hell of a big place, if you ask me.

DEAR Liz:—

I, Ignatz Bruginovsky, your worse half, sergeant first class of His Royal Majesty's Imperial Guards, herewith sends you greetings and salutations. Maybe you wonder how I come to be in the Russian army, but when my old man, your brother Dunk and I hit the village of Yatrnice to visit the old man's relations, they start this damn' war. The old man used to be in the Russian army about thirty years ago. He's got his American naturalization papers, but that don't make no never mind to these Russian bozos. They shanghaied the three of us in the army and all the gabbing we done did us a hell of a lot of good. And that went for Dunk, even if he is a Murphy. They laughed at him

and changed his name to Murphkovitch.

We are lying in the mud along the Bukowina front, if you know where that is, and I am writing this with a pencil and paper taken from the body of a dead Austrian. Pardon the blood and mud smudges. It is the best I can do.

However, we are going to get transferred to France next week, so we can fight with our own Yanks, which they say a couple of million is coming over; and it's all due to that brother of yours, Mike Murphy, or Murphkovitch, the big bum. I know you'll bawl me out for calling him a bum, but that's my narrative and I'll adhere to it until your old man stops calling me a Polack, which will be never. But if I had your brother's lack of brains and his ungodly luck I'd be eating in the Blackstone and come up out of sewers with gold spoons in my mitts.

We have another American in the company, a guy named Crackpot Finnegan, a bozo that travels in foreign countries selling nuts and bolts for some American foundry. He gets into this scrap just to warm up his Irish blood a little. Anyway, he explains your brother's condition, saying Dunk is punch drunk. The idea being that he had received a crack on the sconce which has disarranged his think tank, thereby making of the pool room lounger a brave guy, where before it was customary to give him a swift kick in the pants in order to get him to take the lead out of his hoofs.

That's enough to make a man giggle, Liz. If that's a fact, then the punch was in the bottle and that big heifer in the saloon in Striberna Lipa socked him on the head with the bottle. I've warned him to leave those big Amazons alone, but he has a strange weakness for those muscular bone crushers. That alone proves he's goofy.

Well, the kid is now a subaltern, which is something like a lieutenant, which ought to hand you a giggle. They made the boy an officer and a gentleman; and he has to approve this letter before I send it. Thank God he'll be too cockeyed drunk to read what I wrote! He'd have me court-martialed if he knew what I said.

Well, Liz, you know me; I'll fight even when I'm sober; but, baby, I sure can fight better when I get a few drops of *vodka*, which is this Russian hootch. But, they have deprived us of our *vodka*, saying that we make better fighting men when we get nothing to drink. That's a cockeyed lie. That'd hand a guy a giggle. Listen: If lack of *vodka* makes better fighters of the men in the line, wouldn't it make better scrappers out of the officers? Oh, sure! That's where the giggle is in the general order. We got the order, but the colonel's breath smells like a distillery and would burn with a blue flame if you happened to shove a lighted match up in front of his nose. It ain't right. Hell, we're all human, and the cold searches into my bones as well as into the colonel's.

Anyway, you know the big bum's—I mean your brother's weakness for nose paint. The kid may be lazy and find it hard to shuffle his dogs on the march, but he has a very sensitive nose; and he must have smelled out the spot where the officer's cache their fire water. That's the only way I can account for what happened.

It was like this: We were holding down our first line trenches when the Austrians launched a doggone stiff attack, with a lot of shell fire; and they slammed in hell for leather and we had to retreat to our supporting trenches and call on our reserves to stop the bums. However, we get wise that it was more in the order of a trench raid, to capture prisoners, who would be put through the mill for the information they could give.

We ducked in such good order, however, that we could account for almost every man missing; and among those missing was Dunk. Don't get nervous. Nix, he didn't get killed—no such luck; not even a scratch.

Well, we sympathized, with Dunk, thinking he had been taken prisoner, lose all his buttons, his one ruble watch, and would be holding his pants up with one hand and saluting Austrian *Feldwebels* with the other. That would hand you a

giggle, although I wouldn't care for the predicament.

Well, we thought after taking some prisoners the Austrians would retire to their own lines and call it a day, but no such luck. They stuck; so our artillery slammed down a barrage and the colonel organized a counter attack, led by Captain Serge Rachopomopatekovitch, the big Cossack. If you can't say that, kid, sneeze it. Well, we shoved in there like a mob of Germans at a wienie roast and the Austrians hightailed it.

It was a beautiful and exhilarating battle—pardon my poetry—that made a man's blood surge and his pulses leap. Steel against steel clashed, the machine guns rattled, shells screamed and crashed in great eruptions. We clubbed and speared and shot our way back into our first line. I smeared a big Austrian with whom I had fraternized and exchanged pipes while on outpost duty. I liked the guy, but this is war. If you don't smear them, they smear you. The Austrians had orders to hold on at any cost, and were spurred on by their officers; but we jumped on them like a ton of brick and they lost all their cuckoo ideas.

ALL THROUGH this savage fighting our captain was right up front, having one hell of a time, like an Irishman at a Dutch shindig, knocking those bozos right and left. He's a big guy, with the strength of a hundred men—fifty, anyhow, lest you say I'm careless with the truth.

Anyway, we shoved those bozos out of there, but not before I saw the captain go down; he was struck by a gun butt, injured but not knocked unconscious. Just woozy, you know. I saw his wound and that guy must have a concrete dome. Anyway, as he went down, two Austrians grabbed him; one by the scruff of his blouse and the other by the seat of his breeches. They ran for their own lines, lugging him between them like a sack of prunes.

Instantly a great shout went up, but it was suicide for any man to attempt to rescue him, as the Austrians' retreat was covered by their machine guns on the right and left flanks. And then the miracle happened. Dunk shoved his head out of a hole and gazed with bleary eyes at the two Austrians going south with the captain. As I see it now, he was stewed to the eyebrows and the roof of his thick skull. He ain't got no brains; it's all hollow under that dome of his. He carries his brains in his nose, and can always smell out *vodka*. I'd give a month's pay to find out where he got it.

Anyway, he must have been in that hole all the time; even during the time the Austrians were occupying the trench. Here he was as big as life; that would hand a guy a giggle. I guess the noise woke him up; he looked like a souse who had just been aroused.

"How yah, Dunk?" I said, with some sarcasm. "Where were you all this time—getting your beauty sleep?"

He made no answer, but grabbed my rifle out of my hand, scrambled up over the parapet and shagged after the two krauts. More Austrian machine guns started barking, all trying to mow him down. It sounded like the night of the Hibernian picnic, in Riverview Park, when everybody was turning a ratchet. Well, there he was, galloping along like a balky cow with her tail up in a thunder storm. The machine guns chattered like a lot of clucks at a *kaffee klatsh*, but, strange to relate, nothing struck him. That would hand you a giggle. Where there's no sense there ain't no feeling, anyhow. Believe me, kid, if a souse has a guardian angel at his elbow when he's tanked up, I'll tell the lop eared world Dunk had a whole army corps with him this day.

A half dozen Austrians stopped running, to cover the retreat of the two bozos with the captain, but they ran into a lot of Irish grief, I'm telling you, as Dunk dispatched them with great dexterity. Other Austrians came running to the rescue and ran into the line of their own machine gun fire, dying in their tracks. Dunk, however, ran on like relentless fate.

The two krauts dropped the captain and turned to fight. For the moment, everything on both sides stopped as the three went at it with bayonets and gun butts. One kraut went down with a bayonet in his body. The other turned to run and I saw the butt of my pet rifle shattered on his skull. Such a rifle, too! True as a straight edge!

Before anybody woke up, Dunk stooped and lifted the captain to his shoulders and commenced running back with him. The next moment the machine guns started spitting again. The bullets whipped by him and he reasoned that one would or might tap his *vodka* reservoir before he reached our lines, so he slid out of view in a shell hole.

"By the bones of St. Nicholas," cried the colonel, "there is a brave man!"

That'd hand you a giggle; and I made some wisecrack to that effect.

The colonel glared at me.

"What is that you said?" he demanded.

"Nothing, sir," I replied. "I merely concurred with you, sir."

"It's well you did!" he snapped. "Soldiers," he announced, turning from me, "let that man be an example to you. There is a brave Russian! A man worthy of the Little White Father's uniform! I shall cite him for the order of the White Eagle!"

That'd hand you a giggle; the highest decoration procurable; and to an American Irishman, too. Laugh that off.

"Who is that man, Sergeant?" the colonel asked me.

"He is only my brother-in-law, sir," I answered. "Named Mike Murphkovitch. He's a palooka who sometimes thinks he's a prizefighter. No brains."

"Indeed!" the colonel snorted. "You should have his brains! His act was admirable and worth emulation. If all you rations destroyers would conduct himself as he did, we'd win the war in a week."

That'd hand you a giggle, but you can't giggle at a colonel. Anyway, mebbe so, if we all had Dunk's nose for where the *vodka* is stacked, and could all get drunk into a state of coma so we could feel no pain, cold, hunger, or the lead in our feet.

Anyway, I left your brother and the captain safe in the shell hole. The captain was conscious and profusely thanked Dunk for saving his hide.

"If the Captain pleases," said Dunk, "I'll go back to sleep."

"My friend," said the captain, "you are too modest."

"If the Captain pleases," said Dunk, "I'll go back to sleep."

"Perhaps you feel you haven't done anything to merit my thanks," said the captain, "but, if we pull out of this with our lives, I will cite you for the order of the White Eagle."

"If the Captain pleases," Dunk reiterated, "I'll go back to sleep."

That'd hand you a giggle. What are you going to do with a guy like that? He was so pie eyed he didn't know what it was all about. He curled up like your old man's Irish setter and went back to sawing logs. The captain bound his own wounds as best he could and left his unconscious rescuer sleep in peace. R. S. V. P.

All that day they remained in the shell hole, the captain awake, while Dunk snored like the saw in Mulligan's sash and door mill, over on Halsted Street. And meanwhile the Austrians lobbed over all the junk they had, trying to knock them off; but they couldn't hit the right spot. Yea, bo, a jag is a charm more powerful than any rabbit's foot.

WHEN night came Dunk opened his eyes and peered out at the display of rockets and star shells going up on either side. He thought he was at Riverview Park, at the Hibernian picnic, and that the fireworks were going on; and asked the captain what the hell they were celebrating. The captain thought he was joking; asked him if he expected to stay there all night. He explained that he would have to be carried, as he had a bayonet slash in his leg.

Dunk pulled him out of the hole,

lifted him to his back and set out in the wrong direction with him; and the captain had to gee him around like a horse in order to make him hit our front line trench.

Arrived there, he would have gone back to sleep, but the officers shook his hand, slapped his back and made a hell of a fuss over him. The colonel's own barber cut Dunk's hair and whiskers, and shaved his face. He ate with the captain in the officers' mess and was toasted with wines and *vodka*, of which he drank plenty, replenishing his jag like a man replenishes a fire. Then he was given a new uniform, while I, the top kick, has to run around in my lousy rags. Then he was promoted to sergeant and given even rank with me.

But Dunk was very nonchalant to all this; he showed great indifference to all this adulation. (I hope these big words don't stump you, Liz.) He was too tanked to understand anything. That'd hand you a giggle. The officers thought his indifference was due to his great modesty. Believe me, kid, I giggle as I write this. It caused a lot of giggling among the soldiers in our company, and they dubbed him Unconscious. Believe me, if he lives to tell about the war, he won't remember anything or even remember why he was decorated with the order of the White Eagle.

I went on outpost duty that night with Crackpot Finnegan, and we got acquainted with two Austrians who were also on outpost duty. It was a quiet night. My old man was a Russian and I speak the lingo and some German. Finnegan has been around Europe so long selling nuts and bolts that he knows more languages than a lot of college profs. Anyway, we smoked the krauts' pipes and furnished the tobacco. The tobacco we get in this man's army is terrible, but I put it in a Bull Durham sack and used my imagination. Believe me, kid, this Russian leaf is powerful stuff. One of the Austrians had straight hair and a big, flat beard; but, after smoking one pipeful of my tobacco, it curled his hair and beard until he looked like that Armenian Jew who used to peddle those moth eaten rugs up Taylor Street.

They were a couple of good guys. We got along O.K. They were relieved by a couple of Slovaks who, after they smoked some of my tobacco, promptly deserted to us. I thought the tobacco would choke them, but they never batted an eye. They thought it was great stuff and wanted to be where they could get more. That'd hand you a giggle.

Well, Liz, the next morning Dunk was still too soused to know what had happened the day before. There was some sharp fighting that day and a man needed all his wits in order to save his hide, but Dunk's luck was still clicking on all four. A machine gun bullet scorched his neck and they tenderly laid him on a stretcher, where he promptly fell asleep, and carried him to the field hospital like some palooka that pulls down a million dollar gate. That'd hand you a giggle; a mere scratch, the like of which I've had plenty. And Charley Bukovsky, who was shot through the lung, had to walk. Finnegan says Dunk is Lady Luck's favorite child. Believe me, if I had Dunk's luck I'd get all the 19th Ward paving contracts.

Anyway, his luck deserted him with the doctors, who painted him with iodine, marked him duty, and told him to get the hell out of the hospital; it was no tavern for palookas who wanted to sleep. He wandered out, to raid the officers' *vodka* cache, but Lady Luck was paging him. The captain, limping around on a crutch, found him and took him to old General Horsecar. That's what Finnegan calls him, as he can't pronounce the name. Anyway, General Horsecar pinned the order of the White Eagle on Dunk's blouse. That'd hand you a giggle. There was some drinking, also, and I know Dunk got away with at least two quarts.

Well, the Austrians were bent on shagging us for our position. The next day what started as a skirmish soon turned into a major engagement. We were deluged with a hail of steel and were attacked by at least ten Austrian divisions.

The whole front flamed and smoked in one great battle. Such were the odds against us that we were driven from all our positions and out into the open, where we had to dig in all over again. Our officers exhorted us with prayers and cuss words, and we fought nobly, but we couldn't stem the tide of Austrians until they, themselves, were tuckered out and had to stop for a rest.

Then we showed them of what stern stuff we Russians, plus two Irishmen and one Polack with an Irish wife, were made. Dog tired, from long hours of fighting with empty bellies, General Horsecar organized a counter attack and we lammed down on those krauts like a pack of wildcats and shagged them back to their original positions. But, as the krauts retreated before us, we found many of our soldiers hanging to trees. Seventy-five we counted. Most of them were Cossacks with leg or arm wounds. We Americans think we're a bunch of roughnecks, but we ain't seen nothing.

Old General Horsecar was as sore as a fat guy falling on a boil under his hip pocket. He's got pink whiskers and little eyes, and his face looks like the pan of a Pekingese pooch.

"It's against all the rules of civilized warfare!" he roared, his whiskers bristling like a mad cat's.

The way these babies fight dirty, that'd hand you a giggle. As if any war was civilized. Ask me, and they could hang all the Russians and let us three Irishmen go home.

"Who was the colonel of the Austrian regiment that opposed us in this sector?" the general demanded.

The intelligence birds were buzzed and they said it was some guy named Metzger, which Finnegan says means butcher. They brought in some kraut prisoners, and they said the same thing.

"I'll give any man a thousand rubles and a promotion if he will bring in that so-and-so for me!" the general shouted. "Are there any volunteers?"

Fat chance. No one seemed to know how this could be done, short of surrounding the whole Austrian army, and the general had been trying that trick for months. Even he could see it was a hard nut to crack.

DURING all this fighting, Dunk had lost contact with the *vodka* store. He asked me where he got the medal and the sergeant's stripes. I told him to keep his fat head shut, lest he be demoted; and told him to smell out the *vodka* and to save a drink for me and Finnegan. He found some, but he didn't leave enough in the bottle for me to wet a fly's back.

Getting back to the general, the captain had an inspiration.

"If your Excellency pleases," he said, "I have a man in my regiment who should be able to procure Colonel Metzger for you. I speak of that brave fellow who saved my life and whom your Excellency decorated with the order of the White Eagle."

"Order him here at once," the general replied.

I went after Dunk and brought him to old whiskers. I stuck around—nobody said I should beat it—and saw General Horsecar spread out maps on the table and explain the situation to Dunk. Dunk don't savvy the lingo much and he don't know what this guy is blurbing about. I gave Dunk the eye, so he wagged his head up and down, like a mechanical cow. When the general finished he asked Dunk if he'd try to grab the Austrian colonel. I gave Dunk the eye, motioned as though drinking, and Dunk wagged his head, and said—

"If your Excellency pleases, if I had a bottle of *vodka* to warm me up a little, I'm sure I could accomplish the mission."

"One bottle!" the general cried. "Hell's bells, you may have four—or even five. But bring me Colonel Metzger and you will receive a thousand rubles in gold and I will promote you to a subaltern. I will make plans for this end of the game. You are dismissed."

Dunk saluted and departed with five bottles of nose paint, of which Finnegan

and I deprived him of three. He proceeded to lick up his two and then forgot what it was he promised to do. Came night and Horsecar called us in for more instructions.

"Take twenty-five or thirty of our best scouts," said Horsecar, "and raid the Austrian lines for the colonel. Our intelligence service says he makes a tour of inspection about ten o'clock every night, going down even to the first line trenches. Do the outposts guards fraternize with our men?" the general asked.

Dunk merely blinked his eyes at the question, so I spoke:

"If your Excellency pleases, it is done. When there is no action, they exchange pipes and gossip, knowing that on the morrow they may have to exchange lead. I should not say as much, sir, but I have killed men whose pipes I have smoked."

The general smiled.

"Well, tonight you will have to deceive them," he stated. "Slit their gullets, but spare a man's life if he will give you the password and information. Slip into their advance trenches. If you can do it without any shooting, so much the better. Rely on bayonets and trench knives first. If you can confuse them and make them open fire on each other, so much the better. As you probably know, their trench line is down at the bottom of this ravine—" pointing on the map— "shaped like a crescent, with the horns of the crescent pointing toward our positions. Now, if you attack in the center, in the concave part of their line of defense—if they start shooting from the ends, they punish themselves. Is that all clear?"

Dunk wagged his head.

"Very well," said the general. "I'll have the artillery ready to hammer on the Austrians' ends and back areas in case of necessity. Get Metzger! Get started and God be with you!"

We saluted and withdrew. Dunk stared dumbly at me.

"What did he say?" he inquired.

That'd hand you a giggle, wouldn't it?

"Never mind what he said," I told him. "We're going to die or bring back one kraut named Metzger. Even if we don't get Metzger, we may get another colonel. One colonel is as good as another. The old guy wants to hang him anyhow. Then, again, we may get only cold steel between our ribs and a shallow grave, if the crows don't get us first. Listen: I'll help you if you'll give me half of that thousand rubles and one-half of your subaltern's pay—that is, reasoning that we have success. If we have no success, it don't make no difference; you'll never see Clark and Madison Streets again and that Swede hash slinger over in that one armed joint has probably got herself a new guy by this time."

He agreed to that, so I picked out twenty-eight of the hardest boiled bozos that ever cut a throat in Moscow. Baby, what a wrecking crew this was! Those babies live on fighting and every one of them can drive a trench knife through a brick wall. I explained the action to these bozos, and how they did grin at the mention of excitement!

But first it was necessary to get the lay of the land and a couple of prisoners who knew the lay of the land, so I went on outpost duty with Dunk. The night was dark and the sky was overcast. Dunk and I made our way down to the outpost fox hole and relieved two of our men. We got nicely settled in the hole and commenced smoking some Turkish cigarets I got hold of. The breeze wafted this aroma around and pretty soon a voice said:

"Heigho, Russian. Have you any tobacco?"

"Hello, Austrian," I said. "We have some fancy Turkish cigarets."

"Could I have a piece?" the kraut asked.

"Come and get it and you can have a couple," I said. "Bring your comrade, too. Today is my name's day and I'm celebrating."

We hated to do this, but we had to kill or cripple these guys. We were in a ticklish position, not over fifty yards from the Austrian trench. A cry or a gasp and the whole front would flame into action. We had to do it quietly.

The two Austrians crawled over to us and we gave them cigarets. They sure did enjoy them, I'll tell you. We chinned with these guys and I had a chance to study their faces. One was a Viennese Austrian, by his clipped German accent, and the other had a Slav face. I figured chewing the fat with these birds was a waste of time, so I bumped off the Austrian and grabbed the Slav by the throat.

"One squeak," I hissed, "and your name is *Honza Kudla!* Give me the password and tell me where I can find Colonel Metzger or your name will be *Honza Kudla* anyhow."

"Let up, friend," he wheezed. "Why take my life? We are of the same race. I'm a Czech."

That's a Bohemian.

"Very well—speak, then!" I snapped, loosening the pressure on his windpipe. "No treachery, understand?"

"I am in your hands, Russian," he answered, which would hand you a giggle when you figure I had an Irish mother. "The password is Blue Danube and, if you'll go straight up, you'll find an opening in the wire. The whole defense system is very thinly held, as most of the men have gone to the back areas for refitting.

"If you want Colonel Metzger, you are welcome to him, as far as I'm concerned. You know, up above our second lines, where the hill bends around on itself? Well, back of that hill is a house. That's H. Q. and a P. C, both. You should find him there pretty soon. That's about all I can tell you. If you can fix it, I would like to join my Bohemian comrades in Russia on their way to France."

"As you say, friend," I agreed. "I'd like to get out of this accursed country myself. I'm an American."

I sent Dunk back with him and told him to bring the wrecking crew along. Pretty soon he came along with these tough yeggs and we crawled on and up through the wire. A guard hailed me.

"Who goes there?" he asked.

"Friend," I answered.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

"Blue Danube," I replied, and advanced on him like an avenging angel.

I STRUCK him down with one blow and Dunk and I tumbled into the trench and struck right and left, bumping off krauts with trench knives. Meanwhile the rest of those Moscow crooks piled into the trench, which became a seething mass of struggling bodies and flashing knives. Curses and thuds broke the stillness. Suddenly, a pistol shot rang out—some kraut fired—and instantly the whole crescent shaped line of trenches was a mass of flame and gibbering noise, as the machine guns opened up.

There was much shooting by the Austrians, but no one seemed to know why or for what reason. Nevertheless, every machine gunner was working as if he was getting top wages for making as much noise as possible. We cleaned up our sector of the trench without the loss of a man. Our attack had been a complete surprise. Then we commenced the real dirty work. To add to the confusion and make the krauts think they were being attacked from the center, we traversed a couple of machine guns each way and raked the trench lines with them. The krauts on the two ends of the horn traversed their guns and commenced spraying each other across the concave front. The Russian artillery went into action and raked the ends of the Austrian lines with brackets of high explosives. From where we saw the shindig, it was like a huge pot, boiling and spitting fire. It looked like a major engagement.

We put on Austrian helmets and, leaving some men behind to cover our flank, we charged up and through the second lines.

"Stop running from the enemy, you cowards!" shouted an Austrian lieutenant, as he rose up before me and leveled his gat at me. Dunk laughed and banged his skull with a gun butt, for which I'm much obliged to Dunk.

So far, outside of letting go with the machine guns, we didn't fire a shot. Now

we had our hands full, and we lost two men before we hit the house that was the P. C.

"Comrade, are the Russians attacking down there?" screamed a kraut who had come running out of the darkness.

"And up here, too," I added, as I sloughed him down.

"Forward, boys!" I yelled. "Hook 'em, cow! Let's go!"

Down below us the fronts were pounding, boiling and flaming. Up we went, striking down all those who opposed us. The P. C. was tucked in behind the hill, in such a position that shells couldn't reach it.

Orderlies were running around like cats under bushel baskets; running in circles; officers were shouting orders; that P. C. was like a nut factory full of squirrels.

"We're runners!" I yelled at an Austrian. "Is Colonel Metzger on duty in there?"

Before he could even answer, Finnegan knocked him cuckoo, and yelled:

"The hell with that! Let's rush 'em!"

Which we did, like a flock of elephants on a rampage. We cleaned out that P. C. like a cyclone. Surprise and confusion were our allies.

There was a colonel at a telephone, but we didn't know who the heck he was, so we banged him on the head, gathered him up and started back with him. One colonel was as good as the other. If this wasn't the right bird, what of it?

Up there everything was still topsy-turvy, as the Bohunk had told the truth, and they didn't have many men on the job. Down in the first trench the Moscow yeggs were having a merry battle, yelling and enjoying themselves, and holding their own. By the time we got down there, some one had brought order out of the Austrian confusion. Now they were spraying all of No Man's Land with machine gun bullets; back and forth and up and down; they sprayed bullets in streams.

We quickly evacuated the trench and made for the most convenient shell hole. Then we started our slow progress back across the waste between the two fronts. After about two hours of continual pounding the shooting simmered down to almost nothing. Then we came straggling back one at a time, Dunk and I arriving last with the prisoner. We got back with eighteen of our original force, which was nothing short of a miracle. Believe me, kid, I hadn't had a scrap like that since I helped clean up the Gas House gang down in the Valley.

Well, Dunk got all the credit for the expedition, although I was the brains. The general was tickled pink and kissed Dunk on both cheeks, slipped him one thousand rubles, of which I got my half, and commissioned Dunk a subaltern. He has the paper with the czar's seal and rubber stamp escutcheon making him an officer and a gentleman. That would hand the gang in Terrant's gym a giggle. As he now eats with the officers, he's pickled from morning till night. He doesn't know his mouth from a hole in the ground, sits like a clam and says nothing. The officers think it's his modesty keeps him from speaking, and they think he's a great guy. When a guy don't open his mouth he can't put his foot in it; that's right. So his dumbness is getting him higher wages, of which I collect half. That'd hand you a giggle. He thinks I'm his manager, like I was when he was a ring bum.

However, to finish the story, we had the right colonel all right. He was tried and sentenced to be hanged from the highest tree. We were drawn up, as if for review, in a great hollow square, to view the hanging. Dunk was given the honor of being high executioner. As he had once been a guard in the Cook County jail, that was nothing new to him.

As the noose was adjusted around the kraut's neck, two Austrian airoplanes came zooming over us, their machine guns spitting lead and sudden death, causing a great panic among the soldiers drawn up to view the hanging. Men sagged and dropped and others rushed for cover or hit the ground.

I was with my Moscow cutthroats, and yelled:

"Hold, Russians! Stand together and we'll give them a volley!"

Twenty of us stood our ground. As the plane zoomed over us, I yelled—

"Fire!"

A volley crashed out, and the bullets splintered the fuselage and the propeller; the ship turned up for a moment and crashed down like O'Leary's house the day the wop kids pulled the props from under it.

A moment later and the other one came slamming over our heads, flying low and spitting lead. Again I yelled and another volley crashed into the second enemy. The engine stopped, roared again, sputtered, and then the plane crashed to the ground and exploded in a mighty *whoom!* Believe me, Liz, it was as good a spectacle as the night that ten story print shop burned up down on Canal Street.

Then we were given peace, reformed our ranks and saw the Austrian hanged by the neck until he was dead. The louse deserved it; he had no license hanging prisoners of war.

Then our flyers went over and dropped a note to the Austrian high command, telling them that they could come over and get the colonel's body, if they thought they could succeed in the attempt. They returned a note which said it was against all the rules of civilized warfare, which would hand you a giggle. It's all in whose bum is kissing the canvas.

Well, we'll be pulling out of this lousy country next week. Seeing as Dunk is now an officer, I got him sober and explained it all to him with words and gestures—you know Dunk; you have to blueprint everything for him. Well, he got an audience with General Horsecar and proved to him that he and Finnegan and I are American citizens and ought to be on our way to France, so old whiskers fixed up the passports for us and we're going out by way of Finnland and Sweden. I can't locate the old man, but it's his hard luck; he wanted to go visiting in the first place, and I went along with Dunk, thinking I could pick up some fights for Dunk with some Russian bums. Well, we got plenty; a belly full, what I mean.

Well, see you in church, kid. Guess I'll mail this from Sweden and send you the five hundred rubles I got next to my skin. I forgot to say that I was decorated with the order of the Red Squirrel for bringing down those two flying bums. Well, so long, kid. I'll write soon. With love, your faithful husband and obedient servant,

—IGNATZ BRUGINOVSKY

Top kick first class of His Royal Majesty's Imperial Guards, Order of The Red Squirrel.

Hashknife and Sleepy try their hands at a new range Mystery

JUST about twenty years before Steve Pelliser, owner of the SP ranch, gave his party celebrating the nineteenth wedding anniversary of his old friend, Edward Hart, the banker of Willow Wells, a stage was robbed near the Painted Desert in the great Southwest. Two hundred pounds of gold were taken by three men, who addressed one another simply as Ed and Steve and Spike.

Spike was shot and, upon reaching his little cabin, Ed and Steve were intrusted with the care of two infants they found there.

"I'm a goner, boys. Don't let the law get 'em . . ."

Spike was left for dead, the gold was lost in a brush with a sheriff's posse; but the babies did not fall into the hands of the law.

At the Pelliser party, Jim McGowan was shot and killed just after he had informed his host that he intended to marry Pelliser's daughter, Mary. McGowan had left the house, as had Pink Lowry, deputy sheriff of Willow Wells, who was also in love with Mary. Pink was fired at from the dark, had returned the charge —and Jim McGowan died.

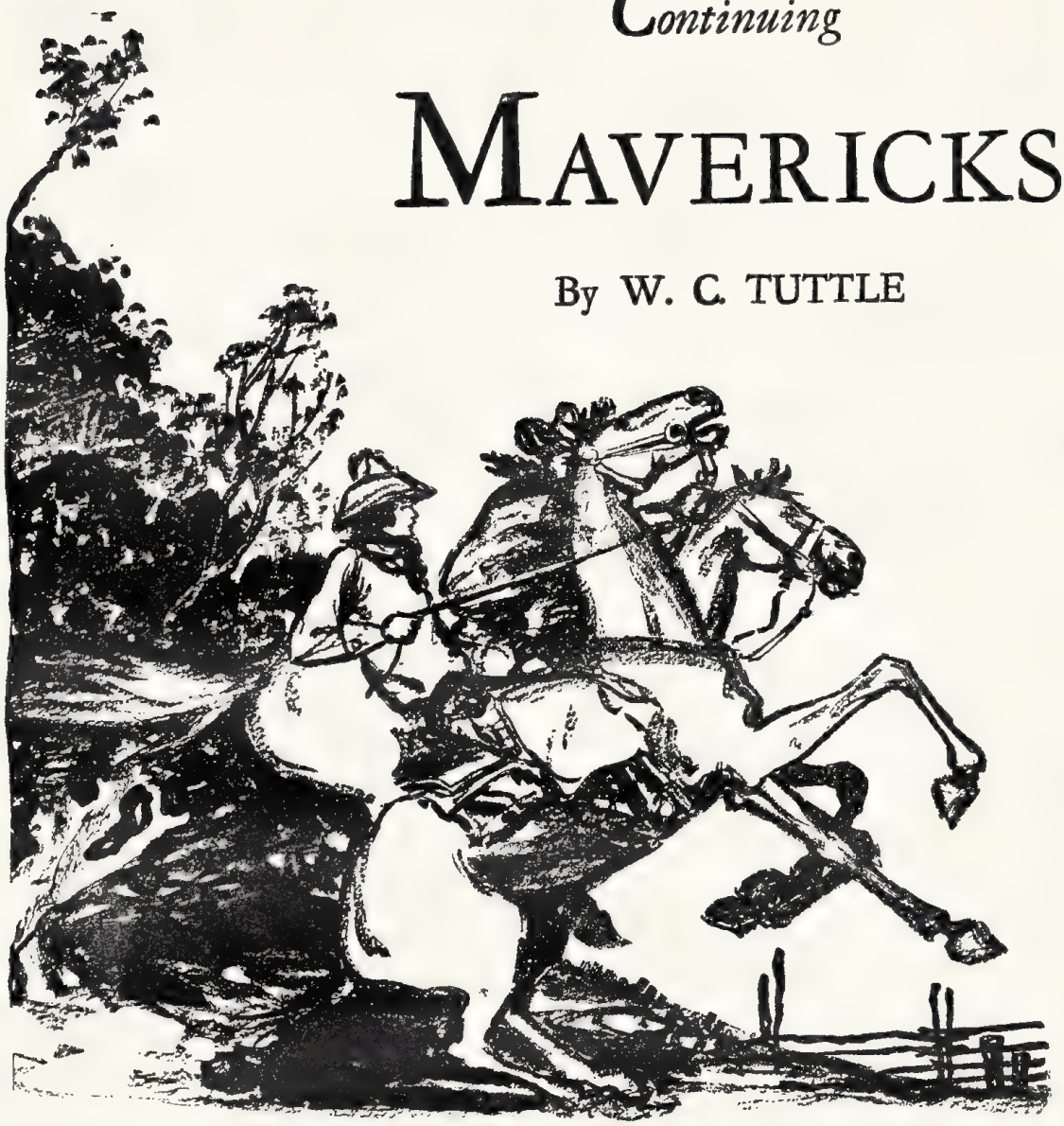
The day after the shooting, a stranger was disfigured by the hoofs of a half wild horse before the War Paint Saloon. When he recovered consciousness he gave his name as Smith.

And, in the nearby town of High Grade, Hashknife Hartley and Sleepy Stevens met William Allen—Bill—McGill. Bill had reached the age of twenty thinking he was the son of a San Francisco doctor; but papers found in the strong box of the doctor upon his death indicated that Bill had been adopted. A few shares in the Willow Valley Copper Company determined Bill to come to the Wells in search of his true family.

Continuing

MAVERICKS

By W. C. TUTTLE



Hashknife and Sleepy rescued Bill from two crooked cowboys, listened to his story and set out for Willow Wells with him. In Cinnabar, where they put up for the night, their horses were stolen. Hashknife borrowed enough money from Bill to purchase others, sent Bill along the road alone; then he and Sleepy rode back to Cinnabar where they recovered their money and horses from the rascally hotel keeper.

Back on the road, Bill McGill was not to be found.

Hashknife and Sleepy went on to Willow Wells, not knowing that Bill had arrived at the SP ranch and was being nursed by Mary Pelliser for a bad case of sunburn. The two cowboys got jobs with Steve Pelliser; and heard that the man, Smith, had gone to work for Scotty McGowan, owner of the Diamond R outfit since the death of his brother, Jim.

Bill McGill went to see Edward Hart, the banker, about a job. A few moments later word reached Hashknife and Dud Evans, the sheriff, that Hart had been shot. They rushed to his cottage to find him in a dangerous condition and Bill,

dazed, with a gun in his hand. The sheriff put Bill in jail.

When the banker died, Hashknife persuaded Pelliser to let him investigate the case secretly. And the next day Bill was removed from jail by a mob. Hashknife went on out to the SP that night, bitterly discouraged. While he was talking to Mary, a figure loomed out of the dark. It was Bill McGill. He told a strange story of how one man had released him from jail a few moments before the lynching party had arrived. Hashknife and Mary decided to hide the boy in an old dugout on the ranch.

"Pardner," said Hashknife, "you've got to play the game with us. If you go back to that jail, your neck will be disjointed inside of a week."

CHAPTER XI

CALIENTE AND PIUTE THROW A PARTY

BOTH Evans and Lowry were gone when Hashknife rode to Willow Wells early the following morning. The blacksmith told Hashknife that Steve Pelliser had gone along with them and that they were hunting for Bill McGill's body. The whole town was talking about it, speculating, wondering who was in the mob. Nick Lee and Sam Hall rode in about ten o'clock, and Hashknife wondered whether they had not come to get the latest information.

Lee avoided Hashknife, and a little later they rode away. It was early in the afternoon when the sheriff came back, and with him were Steve Pelliser, weary eyed from lack of sleep, Pink Lowry and Scotty McGowan. They had overtaken Scotty on the road to town.

"Never found a damn' thing," Evans told Hashknife. "Goin' to get some food and then head north."

Hashknife rode with them, and after a wide circle, they left Pelliser at his ranch. Scotty stayed in town.

"I've examined trees until I'll see 'em in my sleep," declared Pink, as they rode back to town.

Evans was weary and thoughtful. He had expected to have little difficulty in locating the corpse. Hashknife seemed without any ideas at all. Scotty was sitting in front of the office as they rode in, but Hashknife tied his horse in front of the War Paint.

Pink took the two fagged horses to the stable, while Evans talked it over with Scotty.

"What makes you so damn' sure that McGill was lynched?" queried Scotty.

"What would a mob take him out for, if not to lynch him?"

"Suppose it was a bunch of his friends?"

"Rats! Where'd he get a dozen friends?"

"How do you know there was a dozen?"

"Saw 'em ridin' away."

"Yeah? Are you shore Bill McGill was with 'em?"

"What do you mean?"

"Just suppose, for sake of an argument, that Bill's friends knowed he was goin' to get lynched."

"You mean they'd take him out ahead— Where didja get that idea?"

"Thinkin' about it."

The sheriff squinted at Scotty. Evans was no fool, and he realized that Scotty did not arrive at that conclusion from merely thinking things over. Then—

"What friends has he got around here?"

"Well, there's Hartley and Stevens."

"Hartley was with me."

"Where was Stevens?"

"Out at the Pelliser ranch. Anyway, it wouldn't be hard to find out if he was. Nope, I think you're wrong, Scotty. Neither of them boys turned him loose. Somebody lynched him last night and hid the body."

"Have it your own way."

"Where were you last night?"

Scotty smiled slowly.

"No, you don't, Evans. You can't put the deadwood on me. I was home with my gang, and they'll swear to it."

"They would," said Evans shortly.

Scotty stood up and brushed the tobacco crumbs off his shirt.

"Go ahead and hunt for a body," he

said. "It'll give the kid plenty time to make a clean getaway."

Scotty headed for the War Paint, and Evans went to have a talk with the prosecuting attorney. Down in his heart he was not sorry that Bill McGill was not there to have his hearing. In any other place, with no more evidence against him than they had, Bill would have stood a good chance of never coming to trial; but not in Willow Valley.

Scotty met Hashknife in the War Paint, and Scotty insisted on buying a drink.

"How do you feel about this Bill McGill?" he asked Hashknife. "Do you think they lynched him and hid the body?"

"That seems to be the sheriff's opinion."

"What's yours?"

"Me?" Hashknife smiled widely. "I haven't any."

"Did you see them take Bill away last night?"

"It was too dark for that. If I could have seen Bill McGill I might have spotted some of the men who took him out of jail. That would have been rather unfortunate, you know."

"Why?"

"Because there's quite a severe penalty for lynchers, you know."

"I see. Well, I'm lookin' at it from the outside. You're a friend of the kid, and your views would favor him, of course. It's nothin' to me. Hart was a friend of mine, but I ain't the rabid kind that demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Just what the kid had against him, nobody will ever know, unless the kid confesses."

"And if he's dead, he can't talk."

"No, that's the truth. The sheriff believes he is. Matter of opinion, of course, but if I was in his place, I'd kinda look for a live Bill McGill."

Hashknife toyed with his empty glass thoughtfully.

"Jist what makes you think Bill is alive, McGowan?"

"Just a hunch."

"Mm-m-m."

"Do you have hunches?"

"You'd be surprised to know some I've had. Well, let's have another. I'll take a see-gar, if they ain't too dry."

"Hadn't ought to be," said the bartender. "We got 'em for Christmas."

HASHKNIFE was satisfied that Scotty and at least some of his gang were in that lynching party. But as long as they did not accomplish their purpose, the law could not touch them. After Scotty rode away, Hashknife went over to the Bank of Willow Wells, where he found Frank Davis in charge of things.

Davis greeted him pleasantly and they talked about the disappearance of Bill McGill. Davis was a man of about thirty-five years of age, prematurely gray, well educated, trustworthy. He had been connected with the bank about four years and there had been a close friendship between Hart and himself.

"I'm tryin' to help the law out a little on this Hart case," he told Davis, "but we're up against a blank wall. I don't believe for a minute that Bill McGill shot Hart. It isn't reasonable. I want a little inside information, if you'll give it to me."

"I'll do my best, Hartley. Of course, there are things—"

"I understand that. Can you tell me if there's anybody in this Valley who owes or did owe Hart a lot of money on a mortgage or a note?"

Davis gave the question considerable thought. He did not like to divulge anything confidential. He did not know Hashknife, and he was not sure Hashknife was connected in any way with the sheriff's office.

Hashknife appreciated his hesitancy.

"Mebbe I better bring the sheriff up to get the answer," he said.

"No, I guess it's all right, Hartley. The Diamond R is mortgaged with this bank for ten thousand. That is the largest mortgage we hold at the present time. It expires soon."

"Was it taken out by Jim McGowan?"

"Yes. McGowan purchased the property from Mr. Hart, who took a mortgage

for that amount with the Wells bank."

"Would the bank renew the mortgage?"

"That is up to the directors. I believe Mr. Hart would, if he were alive."

"Did any one owe Mr. Hart any large amount on a note?"

"I don't believe they did."

"Mr. Davis, did you ever suspect that Mr. Hart was afraid of anybody?"

The cashier shook his head slowly.

"I am afraid I can't help you there. Perhaps Mr. Pelliser would know. He and Mr. Hart were very close friends."

Hashknife thanked him and went out. The cashier's information was worth nothing. He found Pink down at the sheriff's office. His head was still very sore, but he was in fairly good spirits.

"Dud and the prosecutin' attorney have gone to Newton to wire out some descriptions of Bill McGill," he said. "I guess they've got a hunch that somebody jist wanted to let Bill out, instead of hangin' him. The county is offerin' a thousand dollars reward for Bill."

Hashknife smiled over his cigaret.

"Got an idea that Bill's friends let him out?"

"Looks thataway to them."

"Where would he get any friends?"

"I dunno. You and Sleepy—"

"I was here in town with the sheriff, and Sleepy was at the ranch."

"That's what I was goin' to say, when you went off half-cocked. Why would a dozen men ride up here, pop me on the head and take him out unless they wanted to hang him? My idea is that they're holdin' him somewhere until the reward gits big enough, and then they'll cash him in like a stack of blue chips in a poker game. I may be wrong, but I'm as much right as they are."

"You shore are." Hashknife grinned. "One man's guess is as good as another on a thing like that. I wish you'd tell me about that shootin' at the Pelliser ranch. I've only heard parts of it."

Pink went into details of the story, even telling about the dress suits. He admitted that he was hurt by what McGowan had said that night, and he told about Mary's not wanting to dance with the older man.

"Then you didn't know you shot at McGowan?" asked Hashknife.

"You couldn't see your hand before your face, I tell you. There was only one light spot in the whole danged world, and that was the open kitchen door, and the lamplight shinin' out on One Hop, who was makin' ice cream. I didn't even hear McGowan. Of course, the wind was blowing away from me and the orchestra was whoopin' her up pretty strong.

"I guess I was lookin' toward McGowan. I must have, to see the flash of his gun. The bullet plunked the post behind me, and I shot right back before I stopped to think about anythin'. The flash of my own gun kinda blinded me; kinda scared me too, 'cause—well, I dunno jist why I shot. Mebbe I was jist in the humor to shoot.

"I heard One Hop yellin', and folks commenced to pile out of the house, runnin' down toward us. Then they found Mac. He was hit dead-center."

"How did he know where you were? You didn't have anythin' white on?"

"Not a thing."

"Queer thing, wasn't it?"

"Danged queer. If he knew where I was standin', he must have had eyes like an owl. And you wouldn't hardly think he'd try to kill me just because Mary didn't want to dance with him, would you?"

"I wouldn't think so. Was McGowan in love with Mary?"

Pink hunched his knees up around his chin, smoking thoughtfully.

"Yeah, he was. That same night he asked Steve Pelliser about it. He told Steve he was aimin' to marry her, and I reckon Steve kinda threw a monkey wrench into Mac's machinery. Anyway, they had a verbal run-in, so I'm told, and Steve told him to keep away from her."

"What was Steve's objection to McGowan?"

"I dunno. Mebbe it was 'cause Mc-

Gowan was too old for her. He was as old as Steve, you know."

"I see. And Mac thought you had the inside track on him, eh?"

"That's the only way I can figure it. They dug that bullet out of the corral post, and it was the same size as Mac's gun shoots."

"How did Scotty act about it?"

"Oh, he was sore as a boil. Swore that Jim had been murdered. Me and him almost made some more smoke. But I reckon he's over it now. There's a dance in Newton tonight, and I wish I was goin'."

"Why don'tcha go?"

"Well, I ain't made no plans to go. Been so danged much goin' on. I reckon I'm better off right here, with all these stitches in my head. They have some rough times down there, and I might lose all my sewin'. Kinda ravel out, you know."

Hashknife saw the sheriff after he came back from Newton, and was told that notices had been wired to head off Bill McGill.

"Finally made up your mind he didn't get hung, eh?" asked Hashknife.

"No, I ain't. But I've got to play the game safe. This kind o' thing worries me. If I catch him again, I'll shore guard him close. Things like this make a sheriff look bad. Had your supper yet? No? Let's eat."

While they were eating, the sheriff told Hashknife he had met the Diamond R outfit heading for the dance at Newton.

"Pink tells me that their dances are a little rough."

"Rough? And then some! I keep me and my hired man away from there on dance night. Lot of the boys come up from the south and they shore cut loose. Oh, there ain't much gunplay—not much. But they resent havin' an officer around. I was thataway when I was younger; so I hadn't ought to begrudge the boys a little leeway.

"You know," the sheriff went on, "I always feel kinda like the old-timers—that the wilder the colt the better the horse."

IT WAS just growing dark when old Piute Jones and Caliente Smith rode in from the HN ranch. The two old boys wore their Sunday clothes. Caliente displayed a rusty black suit, with the trousers tucked into boots; Piute was in an ancient cutaway coat and a pair of tight fitting gray pants. He wore an old green Ascot tie and no vest. On his big feet were a pair of congress gaiters, the elastic sides of which had long since lost their elasticity, gaping wide at the ankles.

"We have come jist for fun," announced Piute. "Long time we no have fun, eh? The rest of the outfit has gone to Newton to the dance. Aunt Ida went 'cause the Methody church is givin' a oyster supper. Anythin' the church does will draw her from far and wide. Hoddy hankered to come with us, but he had about as much show as a snowball in hell.

"Chris Halvorsen, he's young enough to dance and enj'y it, and Mrs. Lane elected fer her and Ed to trip the light fantasmy. Me and Caliente, we've long since wore out our welcome on the dance floor. Yessir, we've lost our swing."

"I ain't," denied Caliente. "I'm as young as I used to was, and don't you forget it, you bald headed old badger. I jist come to keep you from drinkin' up all the liquor in Willer Wells and makin' a fool out of yourself. Yes, you would, Piute; you're irresponsible."

"Well, you don't need to be responsible for me. I c'n worry along by m'self. Go on to Newton and dance, you—you damn' infant."

Caliente wore the conventional belt and holstered gun, but Piute tucked a huge Colt inside the waistband of his trousers, the weight of which kept him busy pulling them up.

They took a few big jolts of whisky and Piute essayed a clog dance, which nearly proved disastrous when his ankle turned in his ill fitting shoes.

"Drunk already," said Caliente disgustedly. "Ain't got the capacity of a hummin' bird."

"You think so, do you? Huh! I c'n drink you flat on your old spinal col'm, I'll tell you that. No snake eater from the Modoc lava beds can ever make me wobble. I'm a wild wolf from Snake River, that's me."

"You never saw no Snake River, Piute. You was borned and raised in the Kern River hills, and you never saw more'n two people together at once till after you was of age. Iggerant? My gawsh, you're iggerant! You never had no learnin'. Wild Wolf from Snake River! Where's Snake River?"

"Colorady, you Digger Injun!"

"What part?"

"Part? Splits the State in two parts."

"Oh! Well, what if it does—you wasn't never on it."

"Well, I ain't iggerant, I'll tell you that."

"Let's have another drink."

"All right. But I've had as much learnin' as you."

"Is that so? How much is six times seven?"

"Eighty-nine!"

"Yea-a-a-a-ah! You heard me ask Chris that same question."

"Well, I got the right answer, didn't I?"

"Not out of your own head, you didn't. Here's blood pizen to you."

"Same to you and many of 'em."

Hashknife and the sheriff enjoyed the repartee of the two old-timers, but refused to join them at the bar. It was doubtful whether either could recognize his own name in letters ten feet tall. They were a pair of hard headed old bull whackers, ready to fight at the drop of a hat, sarcastic, argumentive; but either of them would have given away his last dollar to a friend.

"That," said Piute, slamming his glass down on the bar, "is the worst liquor I've had since one day in New York. Me and Cash Rawlins was ridin' down Main Street—"

"Ex-cuse me," drawled Caliente, "but was that the day you bought them rubber ankle things you wear on your hoofs?"

"It was not, dang you! These come from Washin'ton, D. C. These are congress gaiters. Me and Cash was a-ridin' down Main Street, and Cash says to me—"

"Why don'tcha tie a string around your ankles, Piute. Some day a rattle snake is goin' to climb in with you. Haw-haw-haw-haw! New York! Do you know where New York is?"

"I know where it was the time I was there."

"Well, they've moved it from over on the Kern River."

Piute's eyes opened in sarcastic amazement.

"The hell they did!"

"Sho-o-o-ore! The day after you was there. They said we better move this place before that danged liar comes back ag'in. What'll you have?"

"I'll take some more whisky, if the barkeep will strain it. The dang stuff is full of tobacco leaves."

"Leaves!" snorted the bartender. "That's feathers off the Old Crow."

"Yea-a-a-ah? Tryin' to make a piller out of me, eh? No, you don't. I'll drink gin."

"I'd jist as soon drink kerosene," declared Caliente. "That stuff ain't made for human consumption."

"What surprises me is that you ain't been drinkin' it all your life, then, Caliente. You ain't human. You don't need to look at that label, 'cause letters don't mean nothin' but marks to you. *Ah-h-h-h-h! Hm-m-m!* Well, it didn't have no feathers in it. Now, what do we *shing?*"

Hashknife and the sheriff went back to the office.

"They'll both get paralyzed, have a fight, and go to sleep on the floor," said the sheriff. "Salt of the earth, both of 'em, but I don't want to be around when they get to singin'. They'll have a good cry, want to fight a duel and pass out. They've been doin' it for years and they'll keep on doin' it until they die. Why not? It's all they git out of life."

"That's true; why not?"

They found Pink asleep on a cot, snoring loudly, lying flat on his back, his mouth wide open. The sheriff grinned, stepped

in close to the cot, drew his gun and fired a shot through the rough board floor. It made a terrific noise in that small room.

The snore was cut short, but Pink did not open his eyes. He grinned slowly and whispered—

"Shoot 'em again—they ain't got no friends," and resumed snoring.

"My alert deputy," said Evans dryly as they sat down.

Hashknife wanted the sheriff's version of the shooting at the Pelliser ranch and steered the conversation around to it. The sheriff knew very little about it. His idea was that McGowan had seen Pink.

"I know it was dark, but he *must* have seen him, Hartley."

They spent about an hour discussing the shooting of Edward Hart, in which they tried to find some lead to work on. It was a blank wall, no matter what theory they brought up. When Hashknife looked at his watch it was eleven o'clock.

"I reckon it's about time for me to go to bed."

He got to his feet and yawned widely.

"Goin' back to the ranch?"

"I reckon so. I dunno though; might get a bed at the hotel."

FROM up the street came a shrill cowboy yell, the splintering of boards, the report of two guns spaced about five seconds apart. They ran to the door and stepped out on the sidewalk. A man was running from the War Paint, a riderless horse came down past them, turned around and stopped when it stepped on the reins.

"That's Piute's horse," said the sheriff. "Got drunk and fell off, I suppose."

"Somebody come here!" yelled a voice. It was the bartender, out in the street, his white shirt and apron visible at that distance.

Hashknife and the sheriff ran up the street and found the bartender and Caliente. Caliente was staggering, gun in hand, trying to break away from the bartender.

"He shot me, I tell you!" he choked. "Lemme go, will you? I've been his bes' friend, and he shot me."

"Who shot you?" asked the sheriff.

"Piute Jones! Lemme go, will you?"

"He got hit all right," said the bartender. "Look at the blood on his sleeve."

"By golly, I believe he did!"

" 'Course I got shot! Don't I know when I get shot? Been shot hunners of times—hunners and hunners of times. Lemme go, dang you!"

"Hold still."

"Bring him over to the light," said the sheriff.

They led the protesting Caliente over to the saloon. The bullet had furrowed his left arm just below the elbow. It was rather a nasty wound, but not serious.

"Now, what happened?" demanded the sheriff.

"Look at that and ask me?"

"Aw, they got to quarrelin' like a pair of old fools," said the bartender. "And then—"

"I never quarreled like any old fool!"

"Shut up! You wanted to fight."

"That ain't quarrelin', is it? Ain'tcha goin' to stop me from bleedin' to death? How much blood am I suppose to lose in thish argument? Why don'tcha go and apperhend m' murderer? Is thish a debate?"

The bartender waved his arms helplessly.

"If you'll choke him off, I'll tell you about it."

"Choke me! Go ahead. I'm bleedin' t' death, and you want to choke me. Fine lotta cit'zens we've got. Murderers runnin' loose, me bleedin' to death—and you want to tell 'm a story. Oh, go ahead, don' mind me. I'm no use to anybody. Dammit, I'm bleedin' t' death!"

Caliente's voice ended in a despairing wail.

"Where's Piute?" asked Hashknife.

"Yeah!" snorted Caliente. "Now you're talkin' sense. Go ahead. I'm willin' to bleed to death to hear one shensible thing shed."

"They got to quarrelin' in here and de-

cided to shoot each other," said the bartender. "I told 'em to get out and they got mad at me. I got down behind the bar, and one of 'em threw the bar bottle through the back-bar. Look at it—all busted up! Then they went outside together, and I don't know what happened. I found Caliente on foot, walkin' in a circle, lookin' for somebody to shoot."

"I wasn't lookin' for anybody to shoot —I wanted to kill Piute."

"And Piute shot you?" asked Hashknife.

"Ain't I bleedin' to death? Ain't I? He didn't bite me, did he? Looks t' me like a bullet wound. I may be wrong, but I've lost forty gallons of blood already, and no relief in sight. Might as well make my will, I reckon."

"Why did Piute shoot you?" asked the sheriff.

"Jist damn' mean, tha's all."

"Shot you off your horse?"

"I wasn't on no damn' horse, but he was. I got on once, but I got on so far that I went off the other side. Piute rode his horse on the shidewalk in front of the bank, and then he shot me down—the dirty polecat!"

"Did you shoot back at him?"

"I shore did."

"Mebbe you killed him."

"That'd be almos' too good to be true. Jus' one more thing before I shink to rest; how bad does a man have to be hurt before he gits a doctor? I'd crave to know, that's what I'd crave."

"Set down there in a chair and let the bartender put a towel around your arm," said the sheriff. "We'll see if we can find Piute."

"Tell 'm," said Caliente weakly, "that I bled t' death, listenin' to a lot of damn' fools talkin' about the weather. C'mon with your towel, barten'er. You're too late, but it's nice of you, anyway."

Hashknife and the sheriff crossed the street and went over to the sidewalk in front of the bank, where they found Piute. He was sitting in the street, with his elbows over the edge of the sidewalk. Hashknife lighted a match, and Piute blinked up at them.

"Twinkl', twinkl', li'l star," he whispered.

"Are you hurt, Piute?" asked the sheriff.

"There's shome precincts to be heard from yet. I ain't sure, but I think my horsh dumped me here. How's all your folks?"

"Mine are fine," grunted the sheriff. "Can you walk?"

"Why not—I've still got legs."

They helped him to his feet, and between them they led him over to the saloon, where they found Caliente, one arm bound up in a towel, fast asleep with his head resting on a card table. Piute looked him over owlishly.

"Passed out, eh?" he grunted. "Ain't got the capacity of a hummin' bird."

"Why did you shoot him?" asked the sheriff.

"Why?" Piute rocked on his heels, but grasped the table in time. "Why didn' I shoot him, you mean? He shot at me, tha's what he done. Af'r my bronc dumped me, my gun got caught in m' pants and I couldn't shoot."

The sheriff managed to unhitch the gun, and looked it over curiously.

It had not been fired. He showed it to Hashknife, and they looked at each other foolishly.

"Caliente's a danged—danged backbiter," declared Piute.

"You say Caliente shot at you?" queried the sheriff.

"It's too bad he didn't hit me," complained Piute. "Then I'd have shome proof. I shuppose, if he shot me through the heart, you'd be sayin', 'Poor old Piute—his horsh mus' have kicked him!'"

The sheriff had Caliente's gun, and an examination showed two empty cartridges in the cylinder. The sheriff grinned.

"Two shots fired, and Caliente shot both of 'em. All this fuss about nothin'. Piute, you better take Caliente home."

"That danged murderer? Me take him home? Misser Evans, you git funnier every day. You lemme have him and I'll lynch him."

"Caliente must have shot himself," said the bartender.

"Sure," chuckled Piute. "He's jist that handy with gun."

Hashknife shook his head doubtingly. "There's no powder burn on him."

"Well, I heard glass smashin'," declared the bartender. "He must have busted somebody's window."

"Mus' been awf'l big winder," said Piute sleepily, stretching out in a chair. "Mus' have been for him to hit it."

Piute Jones' head slumped forward, and his snores blended with those of Caliente.

Hashknife and the sheriff crossed the street, lighted matches and examined the bank windows. One of Caliente's bullets had hit a big window, almost dead center, knocking out about three square inches of glass and sending cracks radiating in every direction . . .

"That'll cost Caliente plenty money," said the sheriff. "Danged old fool."

"Well, if the excitement is all over, I think I'll get me a bed," laughed Hashknife.

He walked up to the hotel, changed his mind and went back to the ranch. He wanted to see how Bill McGill was getting along.

CHAPTER XII

PINK MAKES A DISCOVERY

IT WAS shortly after daylight the next morning at the SP ranch. The sun was still below the horizon, but the eastern sky was bathed in a warm glow. Smoke was drifting lazily from the kitchen stove pipe, as One Hop prepared breakfast. Perhaps One Hop was cooking a little earlier than usual, as it would be an hour before the breakfast call would come clanging from his gong, a segment of an old circular saw suspended on a wire.

Hashknife was awake. He got softly out of his bunk, looked at his watch and quietly dressed, without waking any of the others. He wanted a chance to talk with Bill McGill before the rest of the crew were around. Mary was in the kitchen, watching One Hop boil eggs and make toast.

The old Chinese, in the secret, grinned at her as he prepared a meal for the man in the dugout. Mary was just a little impatient—afraid some one might see her going to the hiding place.

"Clowboy not wake yet," One Hop assured her. "Steve sleep plenty ha'd. You no be flaid. I make plenty fo' all day. Eight eggs plenty, eh?"

"Plenty." Mary smiled.

She took the food, wrapped it in a towel and tucked it under her arm. Praying that no one would see her, she started for the stable. If she reached there safely, the rest would be simple, because the remainder of her way would be out of line with any window in either the ranch-house or bunkhouse.

She stepped around the corner of the stable—and ran face to face with Pink Lowry. It was such a shock that she almost dropped her bundle. In fact, she did loosen it to such an extent that an egg rolled out and fell to the ground. Pink glanced at the egg, which did not break, stooped to pick it up and found it quite warm.

Neither of them had spoken. But Hashknife had seen Pink just a few moments before Mary reached the corner and had rushed out to try to save the day. He saw Pink pick up the egg. His laugh broke the spell and they turned.

"I didn't mean for you to bring my breakfast out to me, Mary," he said. "I just meant that I didn't want to wake anybody up in the house. But it's all right—and thanks."

He took the bundle from Mary, and the eggs began to fall—one, two, three, four, five—

"Here's your other one," said Pink foolishly, as Hashknife began picking them up.

Mary leaned against the stable, breathing hard, her eyes on Pink, wondering if he believed that all those eggs were for Hashknife's breakfast. Hashknife had all of them that had dropped in his two

hands, when the other two fell out of the bundle.

"Jist like a magician I seen once," said Pink seriously. "Mebbe if you unroll that towel a pigeon will fly out."

"Yeah," grunted Hashknife, retrieving the other eggs.

"You shore have an appetite," said Pink.

"Pretty good, Pink. How comes you out here so early?"

"Oh!" grunted Pink. "I plumb forgot what I came for. Somebody robbed the bank last night and Evans sent me out—"

"The bank in Willow Wells?"

"Yeah. Mrs. Davis was huntin' for her husband, 'cause he didn't come home. He didn't seem to be in the bank, and every other place was closed. It was about three o'clock this mornin' when she woke us up; she was kinda scared. She said he went to the bank last night to fix up some papers—"

"Where and how didja find him?"

"Evans kicked out the rest of that busted winder and we found Davis under a counter, all tied up and gagged. The safe was open and all the money gone. Davis couldn't talk for quite awhile, on account of that gag crampin' his jaws. He only seen one man, who met him on the street, made him open the bank and open the safe. Davis says he heard two shots when the man went out the front door, and Evans says that's when Caliente—"

"So that was it, eh? Never mind the breakfast, Mary. Wait'll I get my horse and I'll be with you, Pink."

Hashknife went into the stable, leaving Pink and Mary together.

"I certainly was surprised to see you," she said, laughing nervously.

"I guess you was. The tall feller thinks kinda fast, don't he?"

"Thinks fast? Why, what makes you think he does?"

"That bunch of grub."

"Oh, you mean his breakfast?"

"I'd like to see him eat it all."

"Oh, he really does have a good appetite."

"Eight hard boiled eggs! Mary, were you takin' food to—Bill McGill?"

Mary's face paled a little, and Pink knew he was right. He took a deep breath, walked almost to the stable door, then came back.

"It's all right," he said softly. "What I don't *know* won't hurt me, Mary."

She blinked quickly and looked away.

"That's nice of you, Pink."

"It doesn't matter, you know. I'll keep my mouth shut."

"I won't forget it."

Hashknife was leading his saddled gray from the stable, and Pink walked to the far side of the building, where he had left his horse. Hashknife grinned at Mary, but received no answering smile.

"He knows!" she whispered. "He guessed it, Hashknife."

Hashknife's jaw set tightly for a moment and his eyes narrowed.

"But he says he won't tell," she whispered.

"Good. Get the grub to him as quick as you can."

Pink rode up to them and Hashknife mounted. Pink did not look at Mary as they rode away, but Hashknife turned and waved at her.

"She's wavin' at us," said Hashknife.

"She ain't wavin' at me," replied Pink doggedly.

"Any special kind of a wave you'd recognize with the back of your head?"

"Oh, go to hell!"

Hashknife chuckled, reached across and slapped Pink on the shoulder. But the deputy was in a black mood; he jerked away angrily.

"Aw, cheer up." Hashknife grinned. "A man must eat."

"Yea-a-ah!" Pink turned and scowled at Hashknife. "You—you or somebody else around this ranch popped me over the head and brought that damn' fool tenderfoot out here, eh? That's fine! And I'm sucker enough to tell her that I'd keep my mouth shut."

"Do you think a lot of her, Pink?"

"Aw, what's the use talkin' about it? I know when I'm sunk."

"If I told you that Bill McGill don't mean anythin' to her?"

"Go ahead and lie about it. I told her I'd keep my mouth shut, and I'll do it. That lets me out. Let's drop the matter."

"Oh, all right."

THEY found the sheriff at the bank with Davis, whose lips were still sore from the rough gag. It was still too early for the town to have learned the news.

"How much did he get?" asked Hashknife.

"Approximately twelve thousand dollars."

"Pretty good haul, eh? What did he look like?"

"Medium height, masked, and talked hoarsely, as if suffering from a bad cold. I had left the bank and was starting home when this man met me. He shoved a gun in my face. He merely said, 'Davis, walk back ahead of me and open the bank. If you make a crooked move I'll kill you.'

"What could I do? There was nobody on the street, but I could hear voices over at the War Paint. We went back and I unlocked the door. He made me stand near the entrance, while he tied my hands behind my back with a long rope. Then he closed the door, which locks with a spring, and made me go ahead of him to the safe. Then he tied my feet and made me lie down. He had not spoken since he met me, except to warn me.

"He asked me for the combination of the safe. I refused to give it to him and he said, 'Oh, all right. I've got a few sticks of dynamite all set to touch off, and if you don't give me that combination, I'll blow you and this damn' bank out through the window.'

"He showed me the dynamite, but I couldn't be sure, because it was too dark in the bank. He was busy at something for a few moments and I asked him what he was doing. He replied that he was fixing the dynamite.

"Well, I gave him the combination, and he worked it by the light of matches, after he had gagged me and tied me up tightly. He rolled me under the counter before he opened the safe, and I didn't see him again. But I heard him leave the safe and stand at the front door.

"That was when a great commotion started out there. I heard the door slam shut, just after the first shot was fired, and then I heard the window break. I thought some one had discovered him, but when no one came here, I didn't know what to think."

"There was two sticks of dynamite on the floor," said the sheriff.

"I guess he meant business," sighed Davis.

"Men who bust banks usually do," remarked Hashknife as he looked around the floor.

"I've looked everythin' over carefully," said Evans. "All I found was the two sticks of dynamite."

Hashknife looked them over. They were of the usual percentage of nitroglycerin used in mining.

"Said he'd blow the bank out through the window, eh?" Hashknife smiled. "Had a sense of humor, evidently. Where'd he get the gag?"

"It was an old dust cloth," said Davis, working his jaws painfully. "And it wasn't very clean."

They left Davis alone in the bank and went down to the office.

"I thought you might have an idea," said the sheriff. "That's why I sent Pink out for you right away. It was the bank robber who shot old Caliente. Prob'ly thought they were after him."

"That's the answer. Did Caliente and Piute go home last night?"

"I don't think so. Their horses were still at the rack this mornin', and I put 'em in the stable. Them two old badgers prob'ly went to the hotel after we left."

As far as Hashknife could see there was nothing to be done. The man had left no clue.

"There's a lot of blind cañons around here," said Hashknife.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you run up against blank walls all the time. Two men dead and a bank

robbed, and I'll defy you to pick up a trail on any of 'em."

"Jim McGowan was killed in self-defense."

"That's what they say."

"Don't you believe it, Hartley? You don't think Pink shot him outright, do you?"

"McGowan's gun had an empty shell, didn't it?"

"Shore did."

"Uh-huh. Well, somebody's twelve thousand to the good this mornin'. Will that cripple the bank?"

"Oh, no, I don't think so; but it'll shore make a dent. That's a lot of money. Didja know there's a thousand dollars reward for Bill McGill?"

"I heard there was."

"Some folks seem to think that the SP outfit know where he is."

Hashknife smiled slowly.

"I dunno, Evans; I never asked the outfit."

"A thousand dollars is a nice piece of money."

"Shore. And Bill McGill's a nice boy—wherever he is."

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand Hashknife. Steve had told Evans that Hashknife was working on the case, but Evans did not understand what it was all about. He was perfectly willing to have assistance, but he did not see what a mere cowboy could do.

CALIENTE and Piute came down to breakfast at noon. They were still grumbling at each other. The bartender had taken Caliente down to the doctor's office, or rather his home, before putting them to bed at the hotel, and Caliente was favoring his arm that morning.

Hashknife made it a point to meet them, and the three of them went to the restaurant together, where Hashknife told them what had happened at the bank and how Caliente got shot. They were amazed.

"We thought you fired both shots," said Hashknife. "You had two empty shells in your gun."

"I allus keep the hammer on a empty shell, young feller."

"That accounts for it."

"But who robbed the bank?" asked Piute, gulping down some water.

"Nobody knows."

They ordered their breakfast, the eating of which seemed to put them in better humor.

"You've been around here a long time, ain't you, Caliente?" asked Hashknife.

"He's the oldest inhabitant," declared Piute, wolfing hotcakes.

"No such a damn' thing! I've been in Arizony a long time."

"Punchin' cows all the time?"

"Not all the time. I've driv' stage, mined a little."

"That was before my time," grinned Piute. "All I believe is what I've seen."

"Who cares what you believe? I had me plenty copper claims in the old days, but they never panned out. Gimme that syrup, Piute. Yeah, that's it—the pitcher with all the flies on the outside."

"How long ago was that?" asked Hashknife.

"Twenty-odd year ago. I used to drive the stage from Cinnabar to Santa Dolores."

"Not very damn' long," said Piute, reaching for the syrup. "They got on to him and fired him off the job."

"No such a danged thing. I quit. Got held up and the guard was shot in the arm. He reached for his gun. The owners of the stage acted as if I should have took a chance, so I got mad and quit. Gimme the syrup."

"I'd believe that if I'd seen it," said Piute.

"Well, I ain't goin' to prove nothin' to you. Jim McGowan was the sheriff of Santa Dolores at that time. He didn't know me, 'cause I was quite a new man there at that time. But if he was alive, I could make him remember me. Him and his deputy took one of my stage horses. You see, them three stage robbers

downed the sheriff's horse and they needed rollin' stock."

"How much money did they git off your imagination stage?" asked Piute.

"Forty-five thousand."

"Haw-haw-haw-haw-haw! Forty-five thousand what? Not dollars?"

"Danged close to two hundred pounds of raw gold."

Piute shook his head at Hashknife.

"You can't do a thing with him when he's thataway. Humor him and wait until he's back to normal."

Hashknife smiled, as the two old men glared at each other.

"Did they recover the gold?" asked Hashknife.

"They never did. Two men got away. The sheriff got one of 'em. The posse shot him, I reckon. I dunno much about it, 'cause I quit my job."

"Tell us some more of your adventures, Diamond Dick," begged Piute. "I've read that one before."

"Read? You couldn't read nothin'."

"That was a lot of money to get away with," observed Hashknife.

"Lot of story to git away with, too." Piute laughed.

"Gospel truth, you—you sidewinder."

"McGowan used to be the sheriff at Santa Dolores, eh?"

"Y'betcha. Served out his term. I heard his wife died up there. That's why Scotty took his body up there, I reckon. Next time I seen Jim McGowan, he was runnin' a big gamblin' house in Apache City. That was about three years later. He shore was doin' great, but I reckon he got to rollin' 'em a little too high 'cause he went out of business, and I never seen him again until he bought out the Diamond R ranch."

"You spoke about the minin' around here," said Hashknife. "Did you ever hear of the Willow Valley Copper Company?"

Caliente thought deeply, and Piute grinned maliciously.

"Pardner, you're leavin' yourself wide open for some awful lyin'."

"I don't remember it," said Caliente. "Nossir, I don't."

"Well, I'm shore surprised," said Piute. "He remembers the Battle o' Waterloo perfectly."

Caliente ignored Piute.

"There was a lot of minin' goin' on, and a lot of companies formed; but I don't remember that one. I owned the Copper Girl, the Copper Kid and the Sweetheart mines, and I had half interest in several others. But they never paid nothin'. Nobody made anythin' until they made that big gold strike out east of Cinnabar. That played out in a year or so. It was the gold from them mines that I was haulin' when I was held up. It was worth eighteen dollars per ounce and I had close to two hundred pounds."

"If reports are true," said Piute dryly, "I reckon me and you better hightail it for home. We'll prob'ly git a lecture from Aunt Ida, as it is. Uncle Hoddy kinda knocked her ears down awhile back. Declared himself as bein' a free man. Since then she's laid off him, but piled it plenty on me and Caliente. He deserves it, I suppose—the drunken idiot."

Hashknife went down to the stable with them and watched them ride away, still arguing. The old men were prone to exaggeration, and Hashknife wondered how much of that holdup story was true. Probably none of it, he decided. Nearly all the old-timers had at least one wild story to tell, but usually they figured as the heroes of the tales. Caliente had merely quit the job because the owners doubted his bravery.

He asked Evans if he knew that Jim McGowan had been sheriff at Santa Dolores, but Evans had never heard anything about it. He had never heard of McGowan until he bought the Diamond R, nor had he ever heard McGowan say anything about ever having been a sheriff.

MARY told her father about the robbery, and he came to town, anxious to learn the details. He told Hashknife that he was a director in the bank. Uncle Hoddy was another of the directors, and

Davis had already sent a man out to notify him. Aunt Ida came in with him. Caliente and Piute had told him about the robbery, and he was ready to leave when he had official word from Davis.

They all met at the bank, in company with the sheriff, to talk things over. It was nearly noon when Sleepy and Thursday rode in. They found Hashknife and Pink at the sheriff's office. Thursday wanted to talk with the sheriff.

"I'm his shadder," said Pink. "What do you want?"

"I'll tell you what I want—I want somebody's scalp. Me and Sleepy found a SP cow this mornin' sucklin' a Diamond R calf. And that Diamond R ain't twenty-four hours old. They might at least wait until a calf gits through suckin', before they *oreano* him."

Pink looked serious. Things like that had been done before, and only in rare cases was it discovered. An *oreano* is a motherless, unbranded calf, legitimate prey of the first man to run on his brand. But this calf had not yet left its mother.

"And we've got the mother and daughter in an old corral, ready to give plenty evidence," said Sleepy.

"That," said Pink, "looks mighty bad for Scotty McGowan."

"I'll tell you it does," agreed Thursday. "Awful bad. He'll have a lot of tall explainin' to do to Steve Pelliser."

Pink stepped to the door, looked out and came back quickly.

"There's Scotty and that scar faced Smith," he said, picking up his belt and gun, which he had laid aside. "Mebbe we better wait for Dud and Steve."

"Good scheme," agreed Hashknife.

A few minutes later Steve, Uncle Hoddy and the sheriff came down to the office, talking earnestly. Thursday told Steve what they had discovered. Steve was mad.

"That's goin' too far," he said angrily.

"Scotty and that scar faced Smith are over at the War Paint," said Pink.

"Let me handle this," suggested the sheriff. "No use makin' trouble out loud. I'll bring Scotty over here."

"Go ahead," grunted Steve shortly.

In a few minutes Evans came back with Scotty, and they walked into the office. Scotty looked sharply at the other men, but said nothing.

"Here's what I wanted you for," said the sheriff. "Stevens and Thursday say they found a SP cow this mornin', sucklin' a Diamond R calf."

Scotty's eyes narrowed, but he did not flinch.

"Plenty nerve," thought Hashknife.

"And the Diamond R ain't more than twenty-four hours old," said Thursday.

Scotty smiled a little, but his eyes were hard.

"Yeah," he said slowly.

"Well?" queried Steve angrily. "What about it, McGowan?"

Scotty looked at Steve for several moments. Then—

"I'd like to talk privately with you, Pelliser."

"Talk privately, eh?"

"If you don't mind—yeah."

"All right, I'll listen to you."

They walked out, crossed the street and stopped near the blacksmith shop. It was too far away for any one to hear what was being said or to see the expressions on their faces. They were there for at least five minutes, after which they walked together up to the War Paint.

The suspense was too much for Thursday. He went over to the saloon, where he met Steve on the porch. They talked for a few moments, after which Steve went to the hitch-rack, mounted his horse and rode homeward. Thursday watched him ride away, scratched his head thoughtfully and came slowly back to the office.

"You can ask me all the questions you care to," he said, "but I'll be darned if I can answer 'em. Steve jist said, 'It's all settled, so we'll drop the matter, Thursday.' "

"Can you imagine that? Droppin' a case of plain rustlin'! What's the matter with folks, anyway?"

The sheriff shook his head. He had troubles of his own. Hashknife lighted a fresh cigaret and smoked thoughtfully.

"Well," said Sleepy, "if he don't care—I don't. They ain't my calves."

"That's the best way to look at it," said Hashknife.

Sleepy and Thursday went back to the ranch, and the sheriff went to the War Paint with Hashknife, where they found Scotty in a poker game. He grinned at them rather triumphantly. Smith was at the bar, having a drink alone. Hashknife studied him at a distance, wondering what he really looked like before the horse kicked him in the face.

There were livid, bare patches in his bristling gray hair, where the doctor had sewed his scalp together. He was possibly past fifty years of age, hard as nails. His fists were gnarled, calloused, and the leer on his twisted face was not good to see. His eyes were a slate blue, and he was evidently letting his beard grow to cover some of his scars.

He wore an old, homemade cartridge belt, sagging heavily from the pull of a big Colt. The holster was held down by a leather string which circled his right leg.

"Ties his holster down," observed Hashknife to himself. "Mebbe his belt fits loose, and the gun bobs when the horse gallops, or mebbe he's lookin' for a quick pull and wants to be sure it comes loose."

THEY were still in the saloon when Hashknife decided to go back to the ranch. He realized that he was accomplishing nothing. Why did Pelliser make some sort of deal with Scotty McGowan? What kind of deal could two men make in a case of this kind? McGowan had not denied his guilt in the matter. It looked to Hashknife as if Scotty had something on Steve Pelliser. It was not like Steve to overlook a plain case of stealing, but it seemed that he had.

Hashknife stabled his horse and went around to the bunkhouse. Mary was on the back porch, talking with One Hop. When she saw Hashknife she came down to him.

"Everythin' all right?" he asked.

"You mean with Bill? Yes, he's all right. Dad seems all broken up over the bank robbery. He actually looks ten years older. I have never known anything to affect him so much. I suppose it's partly on account of Ed Hart's death. So many things happening, you know."

Hashknife nodded slowly, wondering if it was the bank robbery that affected him. Mary said there was no one at the ranch except her father and the Chinese cook; so Hashknife decided to have a talk with Bill McGill. Mary said her father was asleep in the front room and she would go back to talk with him in case he awakened.

Bill was overjoyed to see Hashknife and asked for the latest news. He seemed amused over the fact that they were offering a reward for him. It never seemed to strike Bill that he was in a dangerous position. The bank robbery meant nothing to him. During their talk Bill showed Hashknife the two letters he was carrying. These interested Hashknife, and he studied over them quite awhile.

"If I could only find some one who remembers that Willow Valley Copper Company," said Bill. "But I don't suppose there is any hope."

"I reckon not. I've talked with old-timers. It wasn't much of a company, I guess. Anyway, twenty years is a long time."

Hashknife was groping in the dark for something to work on. In all his life he had never worked on a case that offered so little in the way of leads.

"Mary told me how she nearly got caught this morning," said Bill.

"She did get caught. Pink Lowry knows you're here on this ranch."

"Does he? Does Mary know this?"

"Shore."

"Well," Bill said wearily, "I suppose I'll be back in jail again."

"You stick right here, Bill. If Pink gives you away, he breaks his word with Mary. And I don't think he'd do that."

"He likes Mary, doesn't he?"

"I don't reckon there's any use denyin' that."

"I don't blame him. I do too, Hashknife."

"I don't think anybody would blame either of you. See you later."

Hashknife took care of his gray horse before going back to the house. One Hop was sitting on the back porch, smoking a long pipe. He grinned, and Hashknife sat down with him and rolled a cigaret.

"You been here a long time?" asked Hashknife.

"Yessa, long time. Long time ago I come Alizona. I be heah on SP fo' seven-eight yea' next July. I long time cook."

"Go back to China some day, eh?"

"Get old man, mebbe I go. Alizona plitty good."

They smoked quietly for several minutes. Inside the house they could hear Mary and her father talking.

"You remember the night Jim McGowan got shot out there, One Hop?" asked Hashknife.

"Yessa." One Hop bobbed his head quickly.

"You were lookin' down that way when the shots were fired?"

"Mm-m-m," One Hop murmured thoughtfully. "I no see."

"It was very dark, but you saw the flashes of the guns."

"Mm-m-m. How you know? You not hea'."

"I know a few things, One Hop. You saw three flashes."

The old Chinese let the smoke drift from his wide nostrils in a thin stream, his eyes half closed. Finally he shook his head.

"I hea' two shot."

"You saw three flashes."

Slowly the Chinese knocked the ashes from his pipe and got to his feet.

"I bake blead today," he said. "Must go watch."

He shuffled into the house. Hashknife smiled over his cigaret. It had been pure guesswork on his part, but he was satisfied that he was right. The Chinese had admitted nothing, denied nothing.

That night he and Sleepy talked over things, and Sleepy was inclined to be a little disgusted over the tame ending of their *oreano* affair.

"We turned that cow and calf loose," he said. "Thursday wanted to vent the Diamond R and run on the SP, but I said I wouldn't have anythin' to do with it. If Steve Pelliser don't want the calf, I'm danged sure I'm not goin' to force it on him."

Hashknife smiled, but agreed with Sleepy.

"Sid and Thursday are both wonderin' how it is that the boss will let you spend your time off the job," said Sleepy. "I told 'em you was helpin' the sheriff. That's the only thing I could tell 'em."

"It's all right. But danged little help he's gettin' from me. Sleepy, this is a tough layout. I'm beginnin' to cuss Bill McGill for leadin' us into this place."

"I wonder where poor old Bill is."

"Poor Bill's all right. He's in that old dugout behind the stable, livin' on the fat of the land and hardboiled eggs."

"Well, holy henhawks! *How'd he get there?*"

Hashknife explained all about it. Sleepy was greatly amused when he heard how Mary had run into Pink with the armload of food.

"Pink's no fool," grinned Hashknife. "He knew. But he's stuck on Mary and promised not to tell. He figures that Bill has got the edge on him, and it shore has taken all the sunshine out of Pink's future. He almost bit me this mornin'."

"What do you think about that robbery?"

"I can't even think, pardner. They've got me runnin' around in circles—like a pup tryin' to lay down. They're offerin' a thousand dollars for Bill, you know."

"Yeah, I know—and lettin' calf rustlers go free. Hell of a country."

CHAPTER XIII

THE BRAND VENTERS

THE FOLLOWING morning Steve and Hashknife rode to town, and Sid Brayton went along in the buckboard to bring some needed groceries. Steve told Sleepy and Thursday to ride to

Spotted Horse Springs and see if the water supply was in good shape. The spring needed digging out every season, so they took a shovel and a pick along.

Mary asked to go along. She had not been riding for several weeks. The boys saddled her sorrel, and the three of them rode away together. They took a lunch along to eat at the springs, and Sleepy chuckled when he saw the boiled eggs. Mary did not know that Hashknife had told him about the other boiled eggs, and wondered why he was so amused.

It was about three miles to the springs, and the two boys spent an hour getting the hole into good shape again. Sleepy went out into some weeds to wipe his muddy boots, and got struck in the ankle by a sleepy eyed rattler, which failed to sound any warning. But the stout boot resisted the fangs, and Sleepy kicked the reptile out on some open ground, where he proceeded to kill it with a shovel.

"It's shore funny it didn't rattle," said Thursday.

"Nothin' funny about it," drawled Sleepy. "I was standin' on his alarm clock."

They wanted to skin it and present Mary with the trophy, but she did not want it.

"They don't always rattle," said Sleepy. "They're a lot like folks—shoot first and buzz afterwards. Lucky thing I had on boots—I might have had a sore ankle and the snake would probably have died."

Mary did not seem as happy as usual, and Thursday asked her if she felt well.

"Oh, I feel all right—I was thinking about Dad. He walked the floor most of the night. I can't imagine what's the matter with him, unless it's the robbery of the bank and the murder of Mr. Hart. He didn't eat any supper or breakfast."

"He's all right—jist upset," assured Thursday. "Mebbe that calf—"

"What calf?" asked Mary quickly.

"Oh, I was jist thinkin' out loud. Queer what things will come into your mind. Well, I reckon we might as well start back. Let's go around and take a look at that little waterhole at the old nester's place. It don't run much water, but it helps a lot to clean it out once in awhile."

They mounted their horses and rode eastward from the Spotted Horse Spring. They were much higher than the ranch buildings of the SP, and they could see, far down the hazy valley, yellow and blue hills. Wild bees buzzed among the sage flowers, and humming birds, like streaks of gold, darted from flower to flower.

One of them—gold, with a scarlet throat—investigated Mary at close range, became suddenly frightened and buzzed past Sleepy's ear like a bullet. He ducked quickly and his hand snapped back to his holster.

"Danged things scare me," he admitted, laughing.

"Beautiful things." Mary smiled.

"If they ever hit you, you'll think so." Thursday grinned. "One hit me. I was pickin' some wild strawberries one day, kinda behind some bushes, and I lifted up right in front of a hummin' bird. *Zowie!* He hit me right between the eyes and I went flat. Woke up with both eyes swelled shut."

"Kill the bird?" asked Sleepy.

"I dunno. He wasn't big enough to stumble over, and I couldn't see."

Thursday led the way across a mesa, and down through an old wash-out, where a cloudburst of some remote age had torn a deep swale. They swung back to the left along a narrow mesa and then went down the hill above what was known as the old nester place. Breaking through a screen of mesquite, they came out on an open slope, possibly a hundred and fifty yards above the old pole corral.

"What the hell!" snapped Thursday, jerking back his horse.

There were cattle in the corral. A man was running along the fence, crouched low. He picked up a rifle at the corner, turned and ran down the other side of the fence.

One man was in the corral, scurrying back among the cattle. There came the thud of a bullet and Mary's horse went down in a heap, throwing her down the slope on her hands and knees, while from

down at the corral came the rattling report of a rifle. Sleepy was down, running to Mary, who was dazed. He picked her up in his arms and went stumbling after his horse, which had gone back through the mesquite.

Another bullet screamed off the dirt near him, and some gravel hit him in the ear. Thursday had spurred his horse around, buck-jumping the animal toward the heavy cover, while more bullets crashed through the mesquite. Sleepy reached the brush, staggered ahead a dozen feet and dropped flat.

Mary was unhurt, except for a skinned knee, but she was frightened. Thursday came running to them and dropped down on his hands and knees.

"Are you hurt, Mary?" he asked anxiously.

"Skinned one knee," she replied, panting a little. "I'm all right."

"Catch my horse," said Sleepy. "We've got to duck out of here. We ain't got a chance against rifles, and they may try to head us off. Mary can ride my bronc, and we'll double up."

"Is my horse dead?" asked Mary.

"Neck broke square off. Hurry up, Thursday."

Sleepy's horse only went a short way, and in a few minutes they were mounted and riding toward the ranch at top speed. There was no chance for conversation. Thursday took the shortest way back to the house, but his horse was floundering badly from the double weight before they arrived.

"Didja recognize any of 'em?" asked Sleepy, as they dismounted.

"Not one," replied Thursday.

Mary said she had not, either. Her knee was stiff and she limped badly.

"Well, they think we did," decided Sleepy. "Saddle another horse and get us a couple of rifles."

"The rifles are all in the house," said Mary, and went with Sleepy to get them.

Sleepy selected a pair of .30-30 Winchesters, and was outside with them when Sid Brayton drove in with the buckboard and load of groceries.

SLEEPY told him what had happened, and Sid unhitched quickly, calling to One Hop to unload the buckboard. Sleepy got another rifle and met them at the stable. It was not over ten minutes from the time they arrived until the three men were riding away from the ranch.

They swung out about a quarter of a mile apart, with Sleepy keeping to the route they had followed back. They rode swiftly, keeping an eye on the tops of the ridges. They saw no one. Sleepy came out on the open ridge where Mary's horse had been killed, but found the corral empty and the branding fire extinguished.

He waited there until he saw Brayton riding in from the north side, and went down to meet him. In a few minutes Thursday came riding in from the south, carrying his rifle in the crook of his left arm. They dismounted and looked around the burned-out fire. There were plenty of boot tracks and cigaret butts. There was also an old can half full of axle grease.

Near the fire was an old log, on which several hot irons had been tested.

"What do you make of this?" queried Thursday, pointing at a rather queer burn on the log, which appeared to be fresh.

Sleepy did not know what it was, and neither did Brayton.

"I can danged soon tell you what it is," said Thursday. "It's the vent iron of the Diamond R. They use a six pointed star, cut out of a flat piece of iron, big enough to cover most any brand."

Sleepy nodded slowly. It was the iron used to vent another brand when an outfit bought branded cattle and wanted to run their own mark on the animal. The vent brand was registered the same as a regular brand, but was supposed only to be used legally.

"That don't mean nothin'," said Brayton. "You can't prove that mark was burned today, and you can't prove it was used on our cows."

"Look for a six pointed star vent on the left shoulder."

"Yeah, and the HN outfit brand on the left shoulder, too."

"That's the worst of it. But them jaspers was stealin' cows. You've got to admit that, Sid."

"You're danged right they was. Golly, it's lucky they didn't hit Mary."

"Didn't miss her far," said Sleepy grimly. "Broke her bronc's neck near the shoulder, and the animal was facin' them. A few inches higher—"

"You looked at the animal?"

"Before I came down here. We better collect her saddle and bridle on the way back. There's no use huntin' for them jiggers. They faded out of here mighty quick after we left, and they probably scattered the cattle. How many men did you see, Thursday?"

"I'm sure of three. Mebbe there was more. I dunno."

They took the rig off the dead horse and rode back to the ranch, where they found Steve. Mary had told him all about it, and he was anxious to get more news. He looked a little pale, but his jaw bulged angrily when they told him about the vent mark on the log.

"Of course, you can't put the deadwood on anybody through that," said Thursday.

"No, you can't. Well, I dunno." Steve's eyes narrowed as he looked off across the hills. "I reckon we'll call it a day. If they'd hurt Mary—"

Sleepy explained how close she came to being shot. Steve sighed and went back to the house. Thursday shrugged his shoulders dismally at the lack of fight in Steve Pelliser.

"The killin' of Ed Hart has shore handcuffed Steve," he declared. "He ain't been the same man since. He jist don't seem to care what happens. If we got killed protectin' his danged cows, he prob'ly wouldn't give us a decent burial."

"Prob'ly not," agreed Sleepy.

In the meantime, Hashknife rode out to the Diamond R ranch. He was curious to know how Scotty had squared that calf deal with Steve, but he was not going to be foolish enough to ask him. There was always a chance that Scotty might say something that would give him a lead.

Hashknife had never been there before. It was on the main road to Newton, one of the old type ranch-houses, part adobe, part weathered lumber. The stables and outhouses were all one story affairs. The Diamond R was one of the oldest cattle outfits in the country. The first owners had set out a big grove of cottonwoods, which nearly concealed the old place.

Scotty and Smith were home, and Scotty's greeting was none too friendly. Hashknife had the feeling that Scotty was suspicious of him. Smith was braiding a quirt, seated on a box in the shade of the stable, while Scotty humped on his heels beside him, watching the operation. Neither of them got up when Hashknife rode in and dismounted.

"What's new?" asked Scotty curiously.

"Not a thing," replied Hashknife. "I got tired of listenin' to folks talk about bank robbers, so I went for a ride."

"I reckon it made plenty talk." Scotty smiled.

"And that's all," growled Smith. "That's about all the law does these days."

"That's true," agreed Hashknife. "But what can the law do? When a criminal don't leave any tracks, how can you find him?"

"If I robbed a bank I'd prob'ly leave my photograph on the floor," said Scotty, flipping pebbles at a lizard. "They'd get me before I got a mile away."

"I dunno about me." Hashknife grinned. "It looks like a safe way to get some money. Still, I'm not smart enough to leave without losin' a hat or my gun, or somethin' with my name on it."

The conversation shifted to the killing of Edward Hart.

"You knew him pretty well, didn't you?" asked Hashknife.

"Ever since I've been in the Valley. He was all right."

"What become of the kid that killed him?" queried Smith.

Hashknife smiled.

"The county is bettin' you a thousand

dollars against nothin' that you can't find him."

"Funny deal," said Scotty soberly. "Didja ever find out anythin' about the dozen men that turned him loose?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"They didn't leave any tracks."

"And the kid faded out, eh? I don't blame him—he was guilty as hell."

"That's a matter of opinion."

"It's shore my opinion, Hartley."

"I don't think there's any question of a jury convictin' him."

"Not a bit."

"A cow jury—" Smith grinned crookedly— "ain't nothin' to monkey with."

"I've seen 'em do strange things."

"Well, a jury won't never try that kid," declared Scotty. "In the first place, our sheriff's office is damned inefficient."

"Did you ever work in a sheriff's office?" asked Hashknife.

"I never did. Why?"

"Oh, nothin'. I knew your brother used to be a sheriff, and thought mebbe you worked with him."

Scotty was silent for several moments, scowling at the ground. Then:

"No, I never worked with him at that time. Who told you he was sheriff?"

"I think it was Caliente Jones. He merely mentioned the fact while he was tellin' a story of his experiences as a stage driver. Santa Dolores, wasn't it?"

"Yeah—Santa Dolores. He's buried there, Hartley. You didn't know him, didja?"

"No; that was before I came here."

"Uh-huh."

Smith went into the stable to get more leather.

"Queer sort of a *hombre*," said Scotty. "Good worker, but kinda queer. I suppose that kickin' didn't help him much. He gets bad headaches—bad enough to put him in bed. I kinda feel sorry for him."

"Nice of you to give him a job."

"Oh, he's able to work for his money. Don't smoke nor drink much. Likes to set and work on ropes and things like that. He looks bad, but he ain't."

Smith came out and resumed his seat on the box.

"The killin' of Hart kinda hurt Steve Pelliser," said Hashknife.

Scotty nodded thoughtfully.

"They were good friends. Steve's all right. Me and him get along fine."

THE TALK shifted and they spoke about cattle, with no mention of calves. And as Hashknife did not want to broach the subject, he rode back to town no wiser than when he came. He talked for awhile with Pink, who was still a little sour over his promise to Mary.

"Every cloud has a silver linin'," said Hashknife. "Sometimes you got to put the silver on for yourself. If you wasn't as dumb as an oyster and as sore headed as a bee stung bear, you'd go out to see her."

"She don't want to see *me*."

"Well, she *might*."

"Yea-a-aah?" Pink brightened visibly. "Well, I—what the hell do you know about it anyway?"

"I'm just tellin' you, tha's all."

"Thank you—kindly."

"You're welcome."

Hashknife went on out to the ranch, where Sleepy and Thursday told him about their run-in with the rustlers.

"Too bad you didn't wait and see what they looked like," said Hashknife.

"Yeah!" snorted Sleepy. "And us with two puny six-guns and a shovel and a pick, against rifles. And with a girl. You'd have stayed and peeked, eh?"

"No." Hashknife grinned. "I'd have come home as fast as I could. Mebbe I wouldn't have waited for a horse, 'cause when they're shootin' at me, I'm not botherin' about anythin' but myself."

After supper Hashknife talked with Steve about it. Mary was hobbling around with a bandaged knee, and Steve watched her with gloomy eyes. Steve had little to say to Hashknife, not even making a guess as to who had fired the shots.

"That brand mark on the log don't prove anythin'," he said.

"And," said Hashknife, "if you did find a vented brand on the left shoulder, you couldn't tell whether it was your cow or a HN cow, or some other cow that the Diamond R had shipped in here."

"That's right, Hashknife, you couldn't. It's a mistake for two outfits to brand on the same spot, but both brands have been registered for years, and neither of us have ever thought of making a change. Uncle Hoddy's outfit was originally located below where Newton is now, but he came up here fifteen years ago."

"Sleepy says that bullet only needed a few inches elevation to have hit Mary."

Steve shook his head wearily.

"That's somethin' I don't even want to think about."

"You think a lot of Mary."

"Think a lot of her? Hartley, I'm not a man to make a fuss over anybody, but if anythin' ever happened to her—"

"I know how you feel. Mary is a wonderful girl."

"Well, I don't care much for anythin' else. I sent her away to school, and I was scared she'd get some tall notions—but she didn't. You can't change Mary."

"If I was twenty years younger—" Hashknife smiled.

"I wouldn't put anythin' in your way, Hashknife. I wonder why you never got married."

"Well, I never stopped long enough in one place."

"You don't believe in love at first sight?"

"Shore. But not marriage, Steve."

"I reckon that's a good way to look at it. I think Mary is kinda sweet on Pink Lowry. Pink's a nice kid. But he don't come out to see her. He's fought shy of here ever since Jim McGowan was killed. Nobody blames him."

"He's jealous of Bill McGill."

"Ho-o-o! Of Bill McGill, eh? Well, Bill's gone, and there's nothin' to stop him."

"Would you have considered Bill as a son-in-law?"

"Not in a million years! Why—well, I wouldn't, that's all. I—I want her to marry her own kind of people."

"That's right. Well, I reckon I'll hit the hay."

"Do you know anythin' new?"

"Nothin' worth talkin' about. I think I'll go out and read some brands tomorrow. Mebbe I can find some six pointed stars."

Steve nodded slowly.

CHAPTER XIV

HASHKNIFE JOURNEYS TO SANTA DOLORES

BUT HASHKNIFE did not find any vented brands the next day. He and Sleepy rode all day across the range, looking over bunches of cattle, but not a single one bore a vented brand.

"It looks as though you broke up the party," decided Hashknife. "It was probably their first move at ventin' brands, and you ruined it."

"That's about it. But will they quit at that?"

"Not likely."

They got back to the ranch at supper time and talked it over with Steve, who seemed relieved to think that his cattle were untouched. Steve had been to town that day, giving Mary a good opportunity to see Bill. One Hop kept him plentifully supplied with food, and Mary kept him in books; but she said that Bill was getting restless.

"He thinks he ought to get out of the country," Mary told Hashknife. "I've explained that there's no way for him to get out. Some officer would pick him up, sure. But—oh, I don't know. He gets bull headed at times. You might have a talk with him."

"I don't know what to do with him. I've worn my brain to a whisper tryin' to figure out some way to clear him, but nothin' works out. If he leaves here, he's a goner. There's a thousand reward, which is an inducement to anybody. Anyway, I'll try to talk sense to him. Saw Pink yesterday."

"How is he?" the girl asked him quickly.

"All right physically, but all wrong mentally. Lookin' through blue glasses."

Mary laughed and shook her head.

"I don't understand him. The only time he's been out here since the night of the party was when he caught me with all those boiled eggs."

"He thinks enough of you to keep still about Bill McGill."

"In other words, he thinks more of my opinion of him than he does of that thousand dollar reward."

"Yeah, I reckon it would take several thousands to tempt him."

"Is he—is he sore about Bill being here?"

"Sore about you takin' care of Bill."

"That's foolish."

"Mebbe. Of course, if Pink was hidin' a lady in a dugout, packin' her an armload of boiled eggs at daylight, and you knew it—"

Mary flushed quickly, but her sense of humor was keen enough to see the point.

"That's true, Hashknife. Perhaps I have misjudged him."

"He's misjudged himself, too—and Bill McGill and you. But I had a talk with him, and mebbe he sees the light now. He's not ignorant, you know."

"What in the world did you tell him?"

"Oh, I didn't lie." Hashknife grinned. "I reckon I'll have to make a little medicine talk to Bill McGill. He's educated, but jist fool enough to tie a rope around his own neck. And if he got out and was caught, he'd probably tell where he's been. I'll speak a lot of words to him for him, and I'll also speak a few words to him for me and you. Hangin' don't mean much to him, because he's never been hung, and don't know how painful it might be. Yeah, I'll talk to Bill, plenty."

And Hashknife did talk to Bill. He sat down in the dugout with him and told Bill in detail just what might happen to him if he got bull headed and left his hiding place. When Hashknife was finished, Bill had an idea that the dugout was not the worst place in the world, after all.

"But," said Bill, after making many promises, "I do not see why you are so anxious to preserve my life. What am I to you?"

"It's like this. When a prominent citizen comes to a city, they generally hold a meetin' and hand him the key to the place. Well, the city is Willow Wells, I'm the prominent citizen—and you're the key."

"The key to what?"

"Who knows? You set here and wait developments."

THE NEXT couple of days were devoid of interest, as far as Hashknife was concerned. The sheriff was no farther along on the robbery case, and of course he had no knowledge of Bill McGill's whereabouts. He felt that Hashknife knew something about Bill McGill, but he also had a feeling that it would be a waste of time to try to find the boy. Hashknife was somewhat of an enigma to the sheriff. In fact, Hashknife was discussed whenever a group of men met around Willow Wells.

But Hashknife did not care, as long as they let him alone. He was on his way back to the ranch from town, when he was imbued with a certain hunch. At the ranch he tied his slicker on the back of his saddle, selected a rifle and scabbard and told Mary, who was the only one on the place except One Hop, that he was going away for a couple of days.

He told her to tell Sleepy that everything was fine and that he would be back when he got back. Mary did not ask him where he was going, but she watched him ride away across the hills, heading westward.

Sleepy was a little puzzled and perhaps a little angry. He wanted to be with Hashknife. Mary told him that Hashknife had taken a rifle; and that admitted the possibility of trouble, because the tall cowboy seldom rode with a rifle on his saddle. Steve had nothing to say about it. He and the rest of the boys had been riding in the hills to the north, but found

few cattle. This was rather unusual, as that was their favorite range at this time of the year, and the water supply was still good. They had taken particular pains to look for vented brands, but found none.

"I tell you, Steve's sick," Thursday declared, after supper that night. "He don't eat hardly anythin', and he ain't got a grin in his system. If I was him I'd see a doctor. No use sufferin'."

"Indigestion," diagnosed Sid Brayton, who had not the slightest idea what indigestion might be.

"How does that affect you?"

"Somethin' like si-atti-ky."

"That's him all over."

"If I ever get sick," said Sleepy, grinning, "you jiggers keep away from me. You know too much about diseases."

"Well," said Sid, "I can shore cure a upset stummick."

"How?"

"Stand you on your head and tip her back to normal. Aw, go ahead and laugh."

Some one rode up to the front of the bunkhouse, and they went out to find Pink Lowry, dressed in his blue suit and a red shirt.

"My Gawd!" blurted Thursday. "We ain't done nothin'—honest!"

Pink grinned widely. He dismounted, and Sid sang mournfully:

"Oh, a cowboy went a-courtin',
Dressed in his Sunday suit.
He bowed so grand,
Asked for her hand,
And got her father's boot.
Root, tootie, toot 'n' toot toot!"

"You came jist in time." Sleepy grinned. "We been wantin' a fourth man to make up a poker game. C'mon right in, Officer."

"Wait 'll I do." Pink laughed. "Will one of you hired men put away my horse?"

"Ee-magine that!" blurted Thursday.

"I don't want to git the shine off my boots," said Pink.

"Take 'em off. You ain't got no socks on t' spoil. Mebbe you'd like to have one of us go up to the house and announce that you've arrived."

"You start up that way and I'll shoot you." Pink grinned. "I reckon I'll tie m' steed to the corral fence."

"Yeah, and let him eat a hole in it, eh? That's all your bronc ever gets—post oats. I've seen that buzzard head eat himself plumb through a corral fence. I'll put him in the barn, if you don't think he'll git scared of some oats and choke himself to death."

"Put a halter on him. He can't choke himself with a halter."

"Halter'd prob'ly scare him," grumbled Thursday, as he led the animal away.

"My idea of a good time," said Sid thoughtfully, "would be for all of us to go up to the house and spend the evenin'."

"Wait till Thursday gets back," said Sleepy. "Mebbe Mary will play on the organ for us."

"If you do," replied Pink ominously, "they'll be datin' time from the Pelliser ranch massacree. Good evenin', gentlemen."

Pink went striding toward the house, expecting that the three cowboys would do just as Sid suggested; and they probably would have, except that Sleepy pointed out that it would really be a mean trick. Sleepy had been in love and he knew a few things about it.

Mary and her father greeted Pink warmly, and he forgot all his misery. There was plenty of food for conversation, and when talk lagged Mary played the organ for them. Steve retired early.

"Steve ain't lookin' good," declared Pink. "What's wrong with him?"

Mary shook her head.

"I don't know, Pink. He says he feels all right, but he won't eat and he don't sleep well."

"Stummick gone wrong, I reckon."

THEY went out and sat on the porch in the moonlight. It was warm out there, and they could hear Sid Brayton strumming on his guitar down in the bunkhouse. Crickets chirped softly, and in one of the

trees a mocking bird seemed to be trying to imitate the higher notes of the mandolin.

"I dunno," said Pink thoughtfully. "It's always been so peaceful in the Valley, and now—"

"Something has gone wrong."

"Looks thataway. Me and Dud have been wonderin' a lot about Hashknife. Steve told Dud that Hashknife was workin' on this Hart case. He didn't say why he was workin' on it, nor anythin'. He don't seem to be doin' anythin', as far as we can see, except to kinda set around. He ain't a detective, is he?"

"I don't know a thing about him," said Mary. "Dad gave Sleepy and Hashknife jobs. He told me that Hashknife had an idea that Bill McGill didn't shoot Mr. Hart, and that he wanted Dad to discharge him, so he could investigate. Dad wouldn't fire him. He likes Hashknife—we all like him—so Dad told him to keep the job and do as he pleased."

"I reckon I was kinda sore about Bill McGill," confessed Pink.

"When I met you with the eggs?" laughed Mary.

"Mm-m-m. Well, before that, Mary. Of course, that's the first idea I had that Bill was out here."

"Hashknife is a quick thinker."

"Quick—y'betcha. And I'll bet he'd be a hard *hombre* in a fight. Looks long and thin and kinda quiet, but he's got the squarest eyes I ever did see. They look through you. Oh, I'm for him, even if he did frame up to have me popped on the head in order to get Bill out of jail."

"But he didn't do that, Pink. I could swear he didn't. I tell you he was sick about it, before Bill showed up. He thought they had lynched him."

"Mebbe I'm wrong. But I wasn't holdin' it against him. I couldn't believe Bill killed Hart."

"They'd have hung him."

"Sure thing. I dunno what all them men were doin' there. Dud saw 'em. That is, he saw a bunch of men ridin' away from in front of the office that night. That's the queer part of it all. I never saw anybody, and Bill wasn't there to tell what he saw."

"He saw one masked man."

"Just one, eh? Well, I'm not goin' to worry about it. I'm goin' to keep on drawin' my hundred and ten a month, and one of these days I'll have enough to buy me a few cows."

"That's fine," said Mary. "Dad says you ought to succeed."

"Any man that'll wear a dress suit and a striped shirt ought to."

"I wonder if you'll ever forget that?"

"Not until after I meet the suit drummer that sold it to me. He's got a lot of misery comin'. How do you like this suit?"

"Fine. But I like you better in the clothes you wear every day, Pink."

Mary was very frank. Pink slowly rolled a cigaret.

"Well, I wish I'd have known that," he said slowly. "I could have saved the price of a couple good cows."

"Did you buy that suit on my account?"

"Yea-a-ah—and the dress suit, too. Don't forget the dress suit."

Mary laughed softly, and Pink chuckled over his cigaret.

Suddenly they both looked up, at the sound of a peculiar noise. It was like a sudden cry stopped almost before it began—one sharp note.

"What do you reckon that was?" asked Pink.

"I haven't any idea. What did it sound like to you?"

"I don't know that either."

Sid was still strumming his guitar, and they could hear their voices raised in a heated argument of some kind.

"I guess it was the boys," said Mary.

"Probably was."

They talked for a few minutes longer, and Pink decided to go home. He said he did not want to wear out his welcome. They shook hands solemnly, said good night, and Pink went to the stable without saying anything to the boys in the bunkhouse. He was in fine spirits, whistling softly to himself.

The stable door was half open, and as

he stepped in something struck him over the head and his consciousness went out in a shower of stars. He felt himself falling through space for miles and miles, floating among the clouds. They seemed heavy enough for him to walk on, like huge beds of rubber-like mist, and he was doing well until he fell through a hole and came back to earth with a dull thud.

For several moments he sat there in the dark, staring at the square hole, which was the door, with the moonlight streaming through. He wondered if that was the hole in the clouds through which he had fallen. By degrees he realized that it was a door and that he was sitting in a stable. His head was throbbing, and after an investigation he decided that some one had grafted a goose egg on the side of his skull.

He got drunkenly to his feet and groped his way to the door. It was quiet out there. He leaned against the wall and tried to puzzle out just what had happened to him. There was no question that some one had hit him. He looked inside, but no beams had fallen. His horse was there in the stall, where Thursday had left it.

He walked halfway to the bunkhouse, intending to tell the boys what had happened to him, but a sudden idea smote him and he went back to his horse, mounted and rode away.

"That's a hell of a way to do," he told his horse bitterly. "Here I keep away from her all this time, givin' that danged tenderfoot the inside track on it, and when I do come out for a little visit he up and hits me over the head for it. I'd like to bet forty dollars that he *did* kill Ed Hart. That jigger is mean enough to kill anybody."

THERE was little of the grandeur of the early mining days left to Santa Dolores. The town had possibly fifty inhabitants, who eked out a living from the cattlemen and an occasional mining venture. It was on the same railroad as Newton, but it had become only a flag station, without even a dot on the map to show its existence. Many of the buildings had fallen down, and the inhabitants did not think it worth their time to remove the débris. Santa Dolores was in a fair way to become another of the ghost towns, although the inhabitants swore by the place and wished for another mining boom.

It was close to midnight when Hashknife came to Santa Dolores. He had taken the road over to Cinnabar and followed the old stage road from there to Santa Dolores. It was a distance of about forty-five miles from Willow Wells, but over a road which would be impassable for vehicles. Hashknife did not go to Cinnabar. He wondered if the horsethief was still running the hotel there, and decided to find out on his way back.

He stabled his tired horse and got a bed at a rickety hotel, where the old man in charge showed him to bed with a lantern.

"You won't find no bed bugs," he was assured solemnly. "Even a bed bug must eat once in a while, and our guests are few and far between."

"That's some consolation," agreed Hashknife. "Have you lived here long?"

"About as long as there is. Yessir, I'm one of the oldest." This was said proudly.

"Is this the county seat?"

"Used to be. Yessir, this was shore a good town in them days. We held the honor of bein' the county seat until about ten year ago, when the court house burned down. They moved the county seat up to Piñon City, then, where she is now."

"Court house burned, eh?"

"Y'betcha. Destroyed everythin' connected with it."

This did not sound so good to Hashknife. He wanted to get at some of the old records.

"Remember Jim McGowan?"

"Jim McGowan? Lemme see. Jim McGowan. Did he tend bar here?"

"I heard he was the sheriff."

"Jim McGowan? Lemme see. Well, mebbe he was. Come to think of it,

there was a McGowan sheriff. Yessir, there was. I 'member him now. Jim McGowan. Ain't it funny how you'll forget things like that? Do you know him?"

"He was killed over near Willow Wells a while back."

"The deuce he was! Ain't that too bad? I knowed him so well, too. I'm shore sorry about it. Great feller, Jim was. Us old-timers do pass away. I come near gittin' me some harp lessons last winter. Damn' house fell in on me. I jumped up and down on the floor to see if she was stout. Floor was all right, but the damn' roof jumped down on me. They dug me out and said, 'Abner, you're dead.' Fooled 'em. They all said, 'Well, it's jist like Abner—he will play jokes, even on the undertaker.' I allus was knowed as a great joker. Well, I hope you sleep well. But if you feel like jumpin' up and down to test the floor—remember what I told you."

Hashknife assured him that he did not feel at all like jumping up and down on the floor. It was far from a good bed, but he was tired and slept until nine o'clock. The proprietor cooked him some breakfast and talked incessantly. He had forgotten Jim McGowan, and it needed quite a lot of prompting on Hashknife's part to enable him to remember.

But Hashknife soon found that the man's memory was hazy on most things that happened in the past; so he went out to look over the town. Near the depot was a sizable loading corral and there was evidence that it had been used as a shipping point.

Hashknife circulated around the old town, trying to find some one who knew clearly of the things that happened in the heyday of Santa Dolores. He had little luck, until he found two old men playing seven-up for matches in the livery stable where he kept his horse.

They were a pair of ancients, there was no doubt of that. Hashknife sat down with them. They filled their pipes.

"I imagine you've lived here a long time," said Hashknife.

"If you mean me," said one, "you're all wrong. I'm a seafarin' man from Gloucester. Hennery Cable's my name. Come from a long line of ancestors—mighty long. The first Cables built—"

"He's off like a stick of dinnymite!" exploded the other old man disgustedly. "I've heard that so many times. Seafarin'!"

"I am so, John Byrd! You know danged well I've been around the Horn twice in windjammers. I c'n prove it."

"Twice! And you started from—where was it?"

"New Bedford."

"Uh-huh. Last time you came overland, eh?"

"I did not! All the trippin' I ever done was before the mast."

"Then you're back in New Bedford, ain't cha?"

"I'm right here, you old moth eaten badger."

"Yeah, and you've been here fifteen year. I don't believe you ever seen the ocean, except in a pitcher. Seafarin'!"

The seafaring man glared angrily, helped himself to a fresh chew of tobacco and looked Hashknife over.

"You ain't droppin' anchor in this harbor, be you?"

Hashknife laughed and shook his head.

"Don't. If you ever spoke a word, they'd make you out a liar. They think the Horn is somethin' that grew on a cow. I'm jist about through with this place."

"You'd think he jist come here," jeered the other. "Fifteen years, or I'm a cow's uncle. And the lies he's told about spearin' whales, and wrecks. Huh! Wouldn't know a whale if he met him on the road. There's three damn' liars in Arizony, and Hennery Cable's all three of 'em."

"Well," said Henry Cable disconsolately, "that's the worst of a sailor comin' out here. You can't prove seamanship in no danged desert."

"I've been here twenty-five years, and I'm proud of it," said Byrd.

"A feller like you don't need much to make him proud."

The argument might have been interminable, but Hashknife asked Byrd if he remembered when Jim McGowan was sheriff of that county.

"Jim McGowan? Shore do. Why, he was buried here a short time ago, and I went to his buryin'."

"That's right, he was. Remember him pretty well, eh?"

"Pretty much. I was in and out of here at that time. Minin', mostly."

"Ever know Caliente Smith?"

"Knowed lotsa Smiths, but I don't jist remember that one."

"Drove stage between here and Cinnabar."

"Yeah? Prob'ly. Long time ago, that was."

"Do you remember a big holdup, in which a lot of raw gold was stolen?"

The old man filled his pipe carefully, tamped the tobacco down with a gnarled finger, and frowned thoughtfully.

"I jist do remember that," he said. "It was on a stage between here and Cinnabar. But I ain't so very clear on the details. Lemme see. Yeah, I was freightin' at that time, but I 'member the holdup. They shore got plenty *dinero*, them fellers."

"More than one man?"

"Yeah, there was. Lemme see. Yeah, they shot one feller all up, but the rest of 'em got away with the gold. I ain't recollected that incident f'r years."

"Did this one man die?"

"I ain't shore about that. You see, one man more or less in them days didn't make no difference."

"And the gold mines played out, eh?"

"Oh, shore. Nobody left there now."

"I think there was a guard shot at that holdup," said Hashknife, trying to refresh the old man's memory. "The sheriff's horse was killed, so he took one of the stage horses to ride."

"Yessir, that's a fact. Buck Bowen was the guard. Crippled for life, he was. The bullet took him in the elbow. I kinda remember, now. That feller's name was Neilson—Nelson—Neilan? No, it was Neal—well, somethin' like that. He was tried right here in Santa Dolores."

"Then he didn't die, eh?"

"Mebbe he did. I 'member there was a trial, but I wasn't here."

"How long ago was that?"

"Oh, I reckon about twenty year ago."

"Did you ever hear of the Willow Valley Copper Company?"

"Nope. Don't remember it, anyway."

"Did you ever know a Dr. McGill?"

"Dr. McGill? Can't place him. Was he doctorin' around here?"

"I don't suppose he was."

Hashknife thanked them for the information and went back to the hotel, where he talked with the old landlord again. He remembered Jim McGowan readily, and they talked about Jim's being buried in Santa Dolores.

"I was to his buryin'," declared the old man. "I c'n see it jist as plain as though it was yesterday."

"How long ago was it?" asked Hashknife curiously.

"Twenty-two year ago last winter."

Hashknife gave up. There did not seem to be any one in Santa Dolores whose memory was clear on events of twenty years ago; so he decided to ride back that evening to Cinnabar. But this time he was going to be more careful with his horse.

TO BE CONCLUDED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

The World's Best

I AM glad to announce that Fiswoode Tarleton's splendid story of the Kentucky mountaineers, "Domain", which appeared in our pages in the May 1st issue, has been selected by Paul Palmer, Sunday editor of the New York *World*, for the annual anthology called "The World's Best Stories". As you perhaps know, these stories are chosen from a group of five nominated, for their respective magazines, by the leading editors of the country.

Reprinted first singly in the Sunday Magazine section of the *World*, the collection is later published in book form by the Doubleday-Doran Company, and really gives an excellent cross-section of the best fiction appearing in the best magazines for any year. The *Adventure* selection for 1928 was "Pioneer" by Harry G. Huse.

Ozark Railroading

E. S. DELLINGER learned his railroading in a hard school. In the following letter he gives us some of the factual background of "Torpedo", in this issue.

You might be interested to know some of the factual background behind "Torpedo". It had its origin in a trip over the Ozark Division of the Frisco on Number 35 one night in 1918. On the Eastern Division where I worked, we had a thirty mile an hour limit on all freight trains. I was called out on the Ozark Division where they had no speed limit. Swede Hagberg was the hogger. Just before we passed Diggins, a blind siding, I crossed the cab to ask him where we were going for Number 6, the Kansas City Limited.

"Goin' to Seymour," he returned coolly.

"What time you got?" I inquired, pulling out my watch.

We compared time. We had just six minutes to go five miles and get in the clear for the fastest passenger train on the system. Not a man on the Eastern Division would have thought of going over, but

Hagberg went—and made it—didn't even stop them at the switch. We had no speedometers on the engines, but I counted telegraph poles for a minute and the best I could figure we were making better than eighty part of the time.

This same fellow turned a banana train off the grade near Cedar Gap, all but the engine and the caboose and two or three cars. The company didn't even go to the trouble to salvage the stuff. I don't remember whether it was he or Jones who turned the train over down by Cabool. They had a dead engine four or five cars behind the engine. When the wrecker came for it, it was headed west, and a car of corn which had been behind it was picked up clear ahead of the leading engine.

Oscar Hagberg, Jones, Fred James, Old Pat Doolan—the whole lot of them were fast, and more than one student, after a trip over the Ozark, has decided he had enough railroading to run him the rest of his days. Believe me, they used to railroad on that pike, and from what I can gather around Las Vegas, Raton, and Albuquerque, I guess they weren't much different on the Santa Fé.

As for crawling along the track to flag a train that was following, that was Old Bob Beardon in the days before they had air. Old Bob had a broken leg, a broken jaw bone, a broken arm, and a knee cap knocked off, yet somehow he managed to get back and flag a train behind him. He was still alive a few years ago, still carried his silver knee cap, his silver wire in the jaw, and a silver plate in his skull—and ran the Florida Special and the Kansas City Limited day about.

Old Charlie Hull, out on the Mop, pulled about the same sort of stunt. He told me more than once during the weeks I worked with him about crawling back and dragging a broken leg a quarter of a mile to flag a passenger train before it piled up in Blue River. Yes, it takes guts to work on these mountain railroads. I wish I could put it down in black and white so folks who think all a railroad man has to do is sit up and ride might know.

—E. S. DELLINGER

Where Elephants Go To Die

TO A COMRADE in far-off Peru the history of the mastodons offers a hint that perhaps the happy burial ground of elephants, instead of a hidden valley or cave, is a swamp. It sounds logical.

In reading "Jungle Etiquette" in your November 1st number a thought, on "where all good elephants go to die", came to me which may have been disproved or even impossible. However, I have never seen it mentioned and so would suggest that those interested consider the possibility of sick or wounded elephants stepping off into a swamp as a happy burial ground.

There is some basis for this belief; for are not mastodon bones, and in fact petrified bodies found in surroundings which geologists claim were ancient swamps?

Would like to hear what those "in the know" think of this idea.

—ALEX LARSON, Cerro de Pasco, Peru, S. A.

What Do You Read First?

BROTHER SCHINDLER writes a long letter on the business of fiction, from which the following paragraph is gratefully lifted:

What's the first thing readers turn to in *Adventure*—before they even start to read Tut or the rest of them? Camp-Fire. Yes, sir; you'd be surprised! I believe they get a bigger kick and more entertainment out of Camp-Fire than they do from the rest of the book. I know that's where I always head in first. They can yap about the readers of magazines having twelve-year-old minds and the rest of that stuff, but the average American is a glutton for knowledge of any kind. It's a fact, and I've had it brought home to me innumerable times. Write a yarn about a guy digging a ditch and go along with this ditch digger and explain just exactly how he digs out every shovelful of mud, and they'll get a bigger kick out of that than out of the most unreal cowboy that ever forked a hypothetical cayuse or shot so fast his Colt melted from the heat . . .

—HANK SCHINDLER

Skol!

WE SALUTE Captain Tambs, who is taking his family for a little jaunt around the world in an old pilot sloop. It is heartening to know that in this age of floating-hotels the Viking spirit still sends men down to the sea in SHIPS.

After running down to Aruba for a devil of a long time I have at last discovered something worth mentioning down there; to be precise, a Norwegian author with his wife and five month old son making a voyage around the world in a forty year old forty foot sloop.

Accompanied by a couple of Norwegian sailors from the ship, I went aboard to look the boat over and see what manner of woman it was who would make a trip like that. During the course of a rather large evening, I got the following details.

Captain Tambs had followed the sea from 1903 to 1910 in square rigged ships except during the time he was doing his service in the navy. In 1910 he more or less "swallowed the anchor" and, after saving a young fellow from drowning, landed a place as secretary-interpreter to the boy's father. Later, turning to writing, he just managed to make ends meet. Then, partly to satisfy an urge, partly for material, and partly for publicity, he determined on his present undertaking.

His boat, now called the *Teddy*, he bought and provisioned for about $2,000. She is a forty year old pilot boat built by Colin Archer. Leaving Larvik, Norway, with only a dry compass for navigating equipment, after a stormy sixteen day North Sea trip, he made Le Havre. There an English Colonel offered him four times his initial outlay for the boat, adding that he was a rich man, to which Tambs replied that he wasn't rich enough to buy that boat. From there he went to Cedeira, Spain, and so on to Lisbon where he got a sextant—and what a "ham bone" she is. An ivory arc and vernier and when he takes a sight he divides the minutes on his vernier by two before adding them to the arc.

Leaving Lisbon, he made Madeira with a rough sketch of Funchal for a chart. From there he went to the Canary Islands where, as the paper says, "the second mate received his commission." They met the Norwegian whaling fleet bound home there and received so much assistance Captain Tambs had to dump two tons of ballast. After a five months stay they sailed for the American continent à la Columbus. During the six weeks' trip he would try to check his sun sights for position by taking a shot at the North Star and calling his altitude his latitude. He couldn't work a star sight, which meant he was anything from one half a mile to sixty-four and one half miles out. Eventually, after sighting only one vessel which gave him his position, he made the eighteen mile straits between Tobago and Trinidad.

They came through in a driving rain squall at nine knots an hour with Trinidad invisible three miles away on the lee side. Then a quiet run down to Curacao, D.W.I., where during two months the dog added seven to the ship's company.

They left, intending to run right to the Panama Canal, but the sun had dried out her decks and sides and she started to make water at such an alarming speed they put into Aruba for repairs. The boat with its fourteen foot beam is quite roomy inside and Captain Tambs, who is something of a dauber, has covered the space between curtains with girls of the "kiss proof" variety holding enormous bouquets. Also adorning the walls are his rifle, a barometer, a small library and a copy of Kipling's "If".

Captain Tambs jokingly remarked that his wife's steering didn't help his navigating any as she would run off three and four points. With a charming accent, she replied, "And when my husband is at the wheel he breaks the main boom."

There were eight of us in the cabin talking, smoking, etc., but the second mate in an abbreviated doohickie (I don't know what children wear) slept through it 'til around midnight when, after lying with one eye open for about twenty minutes, he demanded service. When he had a bottle to himself he again lost interest in events.

From Aruba the *Teddy* goes to Colon and then on to Balboa. While there he will make up his mind whether to proceed direct to the South Seas or California. Captain Tambs, I judge to be around forty. (Only a fool tries to guess a lady's age.) Something of an idealist, he seems to me to be a man who has lived too long in a realm of books untempered by the harsh realisms of life.

I leave it to you as "heap big chief" of Camp-Fire to do the honors to the brave or foolhardy captain and crew of the *Teddy*, as one bell has just struck and I have to get my oilskins on.

—JOHN S. CONAGHAN

New Grub Street

A NEWSPAPERMAN-AUTHOR offers his argument in the newspaperman-versus-author debate.

I was very interested in the letter of Herman Olney Parsons, on the subject of newspapermen versus fiction writers, and his confession that working on a sheet too long unfitted him for writing stories. His plaint was brought about, it seems, by reading my tale, "Gangster Town".

Well, I have been a reporter and rewrite man, and may take a whack at it again this winter. What I wish to bring up is that Mr. Parsons is a bit confused. There is no connection between writing fiction and working on a newspaper. Being a reporter is a "job", in which you are sent out on straight assignments, to get detail material and then assemble it in a routine way. It calls for no creative ability whatever, and so is not either helpful or harmful, except that a lot of haphazard color is collected that *may* become useful afterward. It all depends on the man.

He fails to notice the point that when working on a newspaper he is at least earning a living—and there is only a certain amount of free lance fiction writers good, or bad, enough to do that. An executive of a Baltimore paper recently wrote in Mencken's *American Mercury* that there isn't a reporter so poor that he can't get a job somewhere and keep it.

The funny part of this newspaper-versus-fiction discussion is that the staff of a sheet is composed of strong, bitter, cynical men who think they're wasting their time. If they'd only left—some period in their past—they would now be great special article writers or fiction stars. That is a lot of hokum. I could name five or six well known fiction writers—if I wanted to name names—who left the newspaper game because they were fired! An illustrious example died recently; Donn Byrne, one of the great stylists of the decade. He was a perfect flop on two New York sheets.

My argument is that there is no connection between the two games at all—except that a lot of fiction writers did work on newspapers, and talk about it in the golden haze of romance that obscures the past.

If Mr. Parsons or any one else has a natural yen for creating, his journalistic years won't hurt him a bit. Fellows who work on newspapers are always bemoaning the fact. It is rather tiresome. Let 'em try magazine free lancing awhile and they'll probably be glad to get back on the old payroll.

—JOHN WILSTACH

Fairy Tales

I AM one of those impossible, unliterary creatures who does *not* go back to read his books a second time. I have some two or three thousand of them, hanging around. I have read them, shelved them, stored them in the attic—and every now and then, when some friend asks for something to read I make a sentimental journey about the shelves. (I don't know whether or not blue eyes can glisten with thrill and love remembered; but if so, I'm sure mine do.) I usually return to my friend, waiting on the veranda, with an awesome armful—when he or she wanted only one slender volume with which to while away a vacant evening . . .

It was not always so. Once I used to re-read; now I don't. Perhaps the fact that each week I read the equivalent of six full-length serial novels for *Adventure*, then check them back as they come through (the purchased stories) in final cast proof, has something to do with it. Man is given only one pair of eyes. I am not repining; this is my work and I love it.

The other day, down at the greatest university in the world (in point of size, at any rate), however, a full fledged professor of Child Psychology inveighed against the fairy story, stating that it gave the youngster an unreal outlook upon life. It made the boys liars, the girls romanticists. It stultified the formative years of child life, when solid bases for future prosperity should be blocked out and mortised. It—but never mind; it begins to make me angry.

In other words, parents who allowed their four-year-olds to hear a recital of "The Night Before Christmas", and to believe in Santa Claus, or who read them "Hansel and Gretel", were no more than economic criminals.

I wonder if this good professor, for child reading, would recommend Boisguilbert, Vauban, Gournay, Turgot, Adam Smith, Godwin, David Ricardo, Taussig, or Professor Fisher of Yale? Or maybe Karl Marx? I wonder if this well meaning woman ever heard of that delightful human quality called a sense of humor. Or of that infinitely greater quality, that comfort and guidepost to happiness in even the most terrible adversity—imagination?

Bolitho, writing in the New York *World* on this professor's pronunciamento, says that she would not make the youngsters of this coming generation into robots; she would make them *the valets of robots!*

Wish I had that much sting in my own tongue . . .

Having admitted that I am a most unliterary person, a big bruiser who doubtless would have been a professional pugilist—except that certain definite lessons taught him he was slower getting into action than the Mount McKinley glacier—I'll tell a story. Not about Pat and Mike, I assure you.

I was about seven years of age. My chum of the time was about one year older. His name was something like George Vernon Kane—but for some obscure reason we called him Kaspo Kane. He now owns and manages one of the largest export firms in the world. I have his permission to tell this, though I have slightly changed his name.

His father and mother were fairly prosperous folk of the middle class, and they had a big library. Almost all the volumes had been purchased in sets, were gilt topped and with hand tooled bindings. Of course none of them ever had been opened, until . . . but I must not jump too far ahead.

Kaspo Kane one day was caught eating an apple and almost doubled up with excitement over a volume entitled, "Nick Carter And The Red Death Terror".

In those days, reading a dime novel was considered somewhat more immoral than getting drunk and shooting two or three of your best friends now are considered in some parts of these rather peculiar United States . . . At least, you caught hell for reading the dime novel . . .

Kaspo Kane was duly licked, with a trunk strap. More than that, the virgin

library was opened. Somewhere or other Mrs. Kane had heard rumors that Dickens, Thackeray, James Fenimore Cooper, and (of all things!) Meredith were GREAT STUFF. She didn't use those words; I believe she called them fodder for the intellect, or some such tosh.

Anyway, Kaspo was started off on "The Egoist". He had to read it in his spare time, and then tell the story (*sic!*) to Mrs. Kane. The fact that the good woman never would or could understand even the most lucid chapter of Meredith, was the only break the kid got. His wild yarn, made up of remembered passages from Old Sleuth and The Dalton Boys and Nick Carter, earned beaming maternal approval.

"That is the kind of literchure you should read, m'son,"—or words to that effect.

The same night he beckoned me mysteriously from over the snake fence, while I was chopping wood. As soon as I could I joined him.

There was a big, abandoned shack of case-hardened clapboards, sporting a cupola, about a quarter of a mile away. Once it had been a ranch-house. Then it had been a stable. Now it was used as a storehouse for bluejoint hay.

"How much coin yuh got, Tony?" demanded Kaspo fiercely, the minute I came up to him, below the barn. (I was a little shrimp at that time, and thus acquired the nickname which has clung to me all these years.)

I turned out my pockets. Forty-three cents.

"It ain't enough," returned Kaspo gloomily. "You come here."

He led the way over to the relic known as Gray's Barn, then up two ladders through the hay, finally to the little cupola. There was no light, of course, but Kaspo struck a stinking sulphur match he tore off a pack he carried. I got a glimpse of about fifty dime novels, neatly arranged against the wall.

"You can come up and read 'em," said Kaspo. "Only, you got to kitty in another fifty cents. I bought 'em second hand, but I had to promise three dollars for the bunch . . ."

I managed the fifty cents. Kaspo managed the rest of the three dollars—how, I don't know. We both read every volume in the collection. Of course, with chores and all, it took us quite a time.

Anyway, those were fairy stories. Shortly afterward I read Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. Then G. A. Henty, Kirk Munroe, Edward Stratemeyer, Oliver Optic . . . and all of these were fairy tales. For better or for worse, these stories did one thing; they made me *like to read!* And out of reading and writing and all that goes along naturally with these pursuits, I'll wager I've had a better time than most folks in this world . . .

You can't make a writer out of a skilled mathematician; the two mentalities are incompatible. The two men must go their ways, never really understanding each other. Perhaps it is just as well. The world probably needs its Einsteins —though personally I don't see just why . . .

I'm for the fairy tale. I believe in it. Give your boy-youngster Andersen and Grimm, then "Swiss Family Robinson", then "Robinson Crusoe", then "The Flamingo Feather" by Kirk Munroe, then "On To Pekin" by Stratemeyer, then "Chip of the Flying-U" by B. M. Bower, then "Dust and Sun" by Clements Ripley, then "Chevrons" by Leonard H. Nason, and then when he's sixteen—

GIVE HIM A SUBSCRIPTION TO ADVENTURE

—ANTHONY M. RUD

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

D. S. C.

YOU may pick one up for a few dollars, but the chances are very much against its being genuine.

Request:—"Regarding the United States Distinguished Service Cross. I occasionally run across an offering in numismatic sales and am wondering if these for the most part are genuine.

Some American dealers say 'not numbered', while European dealers usually describe the item as 'struck', which I presume means a 'struck copy.' What is the significance of these terms? The price usually asked varies from $3.00 to $5.00, and I can hardly believe that a decoration where there were only slightly over five thousand awards during the late unpleasantness could be so reasonable if *bona fide.*

Would you kindly tell me what are the distinguishing marks of a genuine U. S. Distinguished Service Cross?"—ROBERT I. SHANK, Van Nuys, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—You are quite right in believing that most of the American Distinguished Service Crosses offered for sale are not genuine. Paris manufacturers make replicas of every decoration that is salable. For the most part, these are very easily distinguishable, as they are apt to be a trifle smaller and lighter than the real ones. This is especially true with the Distinguished Service Cross; otherwise it is a good copy. The genuine one is really quite a heavy and solid affair. The French imitation is thin and, if I remember correctly, has either a plain back or there is only part of the design on the back. Whenever you see one for sale without a number or name, you can rightfully assume that it is not genuine.

Both the real and the false are struck. The only medal of any account that I know of that is cast is the Victoria Cross, while the copies are struck from dies. Also, you would not be able to get a genuine Distinguished Service Cross for anywhere near the figure of three to five dollars.

Alaska

PROSPECTING on the Prince of Wales Island.

Request:—"1. Do you think there is any gold on the Prince of Wales Island?

2. Where would be the best place to outfit and start from?

3. What would I need as a complete outfit—tools, guns, tent, etc.?

4. How is the climate there?

5. What is the population? Any Indians?

6. Would I have to have a hunting or fishing license to take what game I needed for use?

7. What are the chances for work up around there the year around, such as mining, lumbering or salmon fishing?" —A. B. C., Leominster, Mass.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—1. That island is largest in the whole Alexander Archipelago, being over 100 miles long and varying from 10 to 50 miles in width. Big range of mountains runs its length with diversified geology, but it is in the extensive mineralized zone covering most of this coast and there are now many gold prospects and several producing mines. The Salt Chuck mine, in Kasaan Bay, is one of the few metal mines in the world shipping platinum and palladium ores (containing gold, silver and copper also). The Rush & Brown is another good property there, also the Kasaan Bay Mine. Many gold prospects also in Cholmondeley Sound, and Moira Sound—all of these on eastern side of island. At Dall Island, close to southwestern end of Prince of Wales, there is a big new limestone property just installing machinery to furnish material for cement plant at Seattle. There is a big marble quarry working in northwestern end of Prince of Wales. Big copper mines around Hetta Mountain on the west coast, etc.

2. Best place to outfit is at Ketchikan, for Prince of Wales. For other islands to northerly, or mainland work, outfit at Wrangell, or at Petersburg, or Juneau. The prospecting is fully as valuable in the

vicinity of the latter towns as around Ketchikan, although those towns are smaller. Ketchikan has about 7000 population, while Juneau, the capital and next largest, has only about 5000.

3. I enclose leaflets giving prospecting hints for this section, also outfit and costs.

4. Winter climate here is very mild—very little snow and cold; some winters in fact it rains from November to April, with average temp. at 40 degrees. The eastern shores of Prince of Wales, however, have more snow and ice. This is due to the central hills, which bar the warm winds from the Japan Stream. Still, the east shore of Prince of Wales has but a foot or so in bad winters, with long bays iced over an inch thick. Summers are usually fine weather—some rain, but from April to October the average weather is excellent. Good trapping on the island—otter, mink, marten, bear, and wolf. Plenty deer and grouse, and streams filled with fine trout. Wild berries all over.

5. Population of Prince of Wales not great; few canneries and mines, and they are widely scattered. Mails once a week to Kasaan and Shakan on west coast. Siwashes all over, but they are mostly civilized and bother no one now.

6. Hunting and trapping license is $2.00 for resident, but $50 for non-resident. Residence attained in one year. But you can always kill any game at any time to eat in camp. No license for trout—only $1 for trollers, or any commercial fishing.

7. Good chances for work in town, or in logging camps. Not good on halibuters, fair on cannery traps. Common labor $3; skilled $8 a day. Lots of work soon on town improvements and big pulp mills.

Engines

IMPORTANT points to be considered in converting automobile motors for marine uses.

Request:—"I have two complete engines, one a Dodge four cylinder—1926, and another a Marmon 6 cylinder—1925. Kindly tell me the size of hull for these engines and any other information necessary."

—JOSEPH SZEGLIN, New York, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. George W. Sutton, Jr:—Replying to your recent letter relative to automobile motors being converted to marine use, I would say it is very difficult to specify a hull for either one of the automobile motors you have on hand. Nor do you say whether you desire speed for smooth inland waters or an outside boat for fishing purposes. There are technical problems to be undertaken in converting an automobile engine to marine use. Marine propulsion is a distinctly different kind of labor for a motor and a number of mechanical changes will be necessary. Only those automobile motors which have forced speed lubrication, as a rule, lend themselves to conversion. Also it is important that the location of the oil sump in base of the motor be taken into consideration in relation to the angle at which the motor is placed on its bed.

Your Marmon Six is by far the more powerful motor, but you will find it is best adapted to a comparatively light hull because it is a high speed motor and should swing a fairly small propeller. The motor should be turned up at least 1200 revolutions per minute in order to get the best results when converted.

A heavy twenty footer would be sufficient for the Dodge and a twenty-five footer of heavy construction for the Marmon in case you want an open launch for fishing. If you want speed, a lightly constructed hull at these same measurements will be perfectly all right for these motors.

I suggest that you look in a *Motor Boating Magazine*, which carries exact specifications, etc., for more specific instructions in your work.

Snappers

HOW to catch them for marketing.

Request:—"In a neighboring stream and large swamp is a variety of turtle which we call snappers. Recently I learned that they are marketable for about twenty cents a pound live weight.

1. What is the time and method of taking, water being from one to ten feet deep?

2. Which is the best way to ship them?

3. Best probable market or the name of some firm that will buy?"—A. A. REDESKE, Mayville, Wis.

Reply, by Mr. Ozark Ripley:—1. Turtles caught best in wire funnel traps. Or if water is clear and shallow in fall chiefly dip them out with long handled dip nets.

2. Ship them in boxes, leaving plenty of air, or any crate through which they can not get out.

3. As for marketing, get in touch with Booth Fisheries, Chicago, Ill.

Deepwater

THE six greatest ocean depths known to man lie in the Pacific.

Request:—"Would like to know some of the deep holes of the various seas and any other data relative to who locates these places."

—R. L. ROGERS, Washington, D. C.

Reply, by Mr. Harry E. Rieseberg:—Last summer a submarine depth was measured by scientists aboard the *Carnegie*, non-magnetic ship of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, as they were cruising due north from Guam to Yokohama, Japan. This depth measured 28,380 feet for a distance of nine miles, a trough deep enough for Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world, to be buried with only 761 feet of its peak above water.

It was named Fleming Deep in honor of John A. Fleming, assistant director of the department of terrestrial magnetism of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, and its location was given as latitude 23.8 north, longitude 144.1 east. The ocean

bottom was 13,200 feet deep for a stretch of 106 miles, 19,800 feet deep for 47 miles, 26,400 feet deep for 20 miles, and then dropped for 9 miles to 28,380 feet.

All of the six greatest depths known to man lie in the Pacific Ocean; the five that are greater than the newly discovered trough mentioned above are Mindanao, near the Philippines, 34,220 feet; Tuscarora, near Japan, 32,000 feet; Mariana, off Guam, 31,000 feet; Kermadec, or Aldrich Deep, 300 miles northeast of New Zealand, 31,000 feet; and Solomon Deep, off Solomon Islands, 30,000 feet. The greatest depth in the Atlantic Ocean lies off the coast of Porto Rico and measures 27,900 feet.

Cameloids

VARIOUS South America wool producing animals, and the prospects in translating the alpaca to the United States.

Request:—"Please tell me about the alpacas of the highlands of South America.

What sort of animals are they and would there be any chance of getting some for breeding purposes to this country?

What part of the U. S. do you think would be the best for them?

—PAUL B. ADAMS, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—The cameloids of South America are of four species: the llama, the guanaco, the vicuña, and the alpaca. The name *Auchenia* is given to this branch of *Camelidae,* the name *Camelus* being used to signify the old world camels. The llama and the alpaca had been domesticated for centuries before the advent of the *conquistadores* and are not found at present in their wild state. The alpaca and the vicuña produce the most valuable wool, the former on account of quantity and the latter on account of the extreme fine quality. In ancient times it was used exclusively for the dress of the ruling Incas. Llama and guanaco wool is very coarse but makes excellent blankets and sweaters.

The alpacas are herded in large flocks on the high tablelands of the Andes of Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador at an elevation of from 12,000 to 18,000 feet. They are not used for pack animals, as are the llamas, whole droves of which may be seen on the high trails bearing ore and merchandise in all parts of the Andes. They are brown to black in color, with long wool reaching almost to the ground. They are smaller in size than either the llama, guanaco, or vicuña but all four of the beasts have the vicious habit of spitting or sniffling a burning mucous or spittle (I could never see whether it came from the nose or the mouth) which in addition to kicking or stamping is their mode of defense. This substance is so acrid it will almost raise a blister where it hits on the skin of a white man and is very painful, indeed, when it lands in the eyes.

If you have never seen an alpaca I doubt if I could describe just what one looks like. They are not so large as llamas although they have quite large bodies, but they have short, stumpy legs, and a huge neck which juts upward in a curve, with a peculiar head balanced on the end which is hornless, with a couple of peaked ears topping the whole. Some are white in color and now and then one may be seen half white and half black, the dividing line running exactly down the middle of the back to the tip of the bushy tail. The reason for the scarceness of white and gray colored ones is due to the fact that black and brown wool is more valuable and these colors are picked for breeding.

Numerous attempts have been made to transplant the alpaca to other lands but so far as I know these attempts have been unsuccessful. Almost every zoo has llamas and a few of them also have guanacos and vicuñas, but I have seen no alpacas in captivity in this country. The best country for them, if they could possibly be transplanted, would be the mountains of Colorado or Wyoming and the highlands of Montana. Up higher than sheep can exist either for climate or food is where the alpaca begins, and from then on up, for the alpaca is a beast that "thrives on nothing" as the highland Indians say it.

Because an alpaca is of a different shape from a sheep it is hard to compare them. An alpaca can look you squarely in the eye but the top of his body is about as high as a sheep's. But underneath he has a big chest resting on two stumps of front legs and then he has a small waist with long, fat hind legs, arching backwards. In fact, if you have never seen an alpaca and met one in the road you would figure it was some sort of unreal thing the kids had rigged up to fool folks with. If a giraffe were only one-eighth as tall as he is and you turned this diminutive animal around and put a huge bulging neck on the tail-end and then folded him up a bit like an accordion and then draped long fleecy wool over the *tout ensemble* and put the solemn face of a very old woman at the end of the neck and added the pop-eyes of a marmoset as large as gold balls, but very limpid, you would have something that looked like a common, every day alpaca.

They are worth down there—ordinary alpaca from $50. to $150. Good breeding stock from $150. to $250. Extra fine up to $350.

They are sheared today as they were a thousand years ago—by hand. They are run into stone corrals, roped and thrown, and the wool cut off in the following manner: The shearer grasps a handful of wool and cuts it off close up to the body with his knife and repeats the process until the whole coat is haggled off. Every two years is the ancient custom but due to the demand for alpaca wool the Indians in some parts shear once a year. It is said this increases the yield. The average per animal is three and a half pounds.

My advice would be, if you are asking for information in contemplation of raising alpacas for their wool, would be to go down there and acquire a herd in Bolivia or Peru and range them in their native habitat.

The Mounted

ON THE qualifications for enlistment in this famous police unit.

Request:—"I would like the following information about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

1. Where are General Headquarters?
2. What are the qualifications and physical requirements?
3. Do you have to be a British or Canadian citizen to join?
4. What pay do they receive and what are the chances of advancement?
5. What kind of equipment and uniforms do they have?
6. Do they have stations all over Canada?"

—RAYOLA COX, Centralia, Mo.

Reply, by Mr. Patrick Lee:—1. The Headquarters of the R.C.M. Police is at Ottawa, Ont.

2. Applicants must be at least 5 feet 8 inches tall and of good health and physique. A fair education is expected and character references must be provided.

3. Recruits must be unmarried British (which means Canadian, English, Australian, etc.) subjects between the ages of 18 and 32.

4. Pay for constables is $2 a day, with maintenance. Chances for advancement and for making extra pay are quite fair. The allowances (for traveling, etc.) are generous. The majority of the commissioned officers have passed through the ranks.

5. The uniforms are of two kinds, dress and service. The equipment naturally varies with location and type of duty—for instance, a prairie detachment will have horses, whereas a post in the N.W.T. will have dogs, canoes and maybe a motor launch; and a post in Toronto or other cities' motorcycles.

6. Yes. The R.C.M. Police enforce Dominion law only in the Provinces, but in the National Parks, in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories they enforce all laws in addition to performing numerous other duties (such as postmasters, customs officers, game protectors etc.).

Diving

HOW a few of the more common of the fancy dives are performed.

Request:—"I would like information on how to do fancy dives, such as the jackknife, swan, flip, back, etc. Also the fastest way to swim on the back, and long distance under-water swimming."

—J. HOWARD SEYMOUR, Batavia, Illinois.

Reply, by Mr. Louis De B. Handley:—A general rule to be borne in mind in executing all fancy dives is that good height must be gained in taking off, in order to ably perform every dive.

To attain good height it is necessary to strike the springboard vigorously, landing almost flat-footed, not on tiptoe, and waiting for the rebound of the board to leap, instead of springing at once, so that the board is moving downward when the feet leave it.

The forward jackknife is executed by leaping upward, folding at the waist in mid-air, but keeping head raised in so doing, then snapping the body straight, dropping the head, and entering the water almost perpendicularly, with arms outstretched above shoulders, and body forming a straight line from fingers to pointed toes.

The swan is a plain front dive performed with arms flung out at the sides. To make it effectively the head must be held well up and the body arched until the downward flight starts, when the arms are drawn together, the head is dropped and the body straightened, to enter in the position described for the jackknife.

For the flip, stand on the end of the board, ball of feet used for balance, arms thrust forward at height of shoulders. Swing arms upward, simultaneously throwing back head in leaping, and kick upward, bending at the waist. Then bring hands to side, straighten body, and enter feet first, body erect, toes pointed.

Stand in the same manner for back dive. Swing arms and throw back head in leaping, but endeavor to rise high and increase arch of body after leaving board. Enter with body forming a straight line.

The fastest stroke for swimming on the back is the back crawl and for underwater swimming a combination of the crawl leg drive and a sculling motion of hands, arms to be held close to the sides, so that hands will be near thighs.

Tropical Hint

A HANDY way of keeping your matches dry.

Request:—"Please tell me how to keep matches dry?"

—EUGENE SCHIFFEL, Elko, Nev.

Reply, by Mr. Charles Bell Emerson:—The best way I have found for the "dry match" problem, is to use two or three old shotgun shells, each fitted with a good rubber or cork plug that fits water tight, with a little melted bees-wax on each plug, and arranged so that the plugs can be tied in securely, by proper half hitches around the shell. If you happen to get under water, you will find the matches are dry, but be sure and wipe off the shell in each case, before pulling the plug.

Archery

THE Welshman who put an arrow through a four-inch oak door couldn't have done much better with a high powered bullet.

Request:—"1. Please tell me how strong bows are made and how far they shoot.

2. Is it true that they shoot through armor?

3. What are bows made of?

4. Who is now the national champion?

5. What size bow and arrows are best for boy 12 years old and 4 feet 11 inches tall?"

—CHARLES HATHAWAY, Los Angeles, Cal.

Reply, by Mr. Earl B. Powell:—1. Bows run from about 20 lbs. for younger boys and girls to about 25 for women, and from there up to 35 lbs., for men they usually run from 35 to 45 lbs. for target work and from that on up for hunting, some hunters using bows that pull about 100 lbs. Personally I have drawn up to 160 lbs., but these strong bows are just a stunt and have no practical value.

2. Yes, there are suits of armor (or were at one time) in the Tower of London that show that the arrows went through the breast-plate, the man in behind it and after going through all this, punctured the back plate also. There is also an oak door 4 inches thick that a Welsh archer shot an arrow into when shooting at some fleeing English soldiers, and the point shows through the wood. The Welsh were the most powerful of all the British archers.

3. Bows are made of everything under the sun almost. Such materials as wood, horn, steel, bronze, bone, deerhorn, dried elephant hide, ivory, etc., have been used. Arab kids used to use camel ribs. Wood is most used. Horn bows shoot the farthest.

4. The national champion is now Dr. E. K. Roberts of Ventura, California, who broke records that had stood for 72 years, at the National Tournament held at Santa Barbara last July 30 to Aug. 2, inclusive.

5. For a boy 4 ft. 11 in. tall of ordinary strength, I would advise a 5 foot bow, with arrows 24 inches long. Bow should weigh about 28 to 35 pounds, say about 30 lbs.

ADVENTURE is interested in hearing from readers who feel they are qualified to act as experts on the subjects of "Track" and "Entomology", respectively, for the Ask Adventure department. Please address applications and inquiries to The Managing Editor, *Adventure*, 161 Sixth Ave., New York, N.Y.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville, Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and Traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer, 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., 117 North Boulevard, Deland, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 3758 81st Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S", Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure*.

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure*.

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies).* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*.

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey Street, New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball I. S. ROSE, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times*, Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure*.

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean.* (*Siberian Waters*).—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure*.

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star*, Fielding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandbridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States; and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, 140 W. 75th St., New York, N. Y.

Asia Part 3 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 4 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Asia Part 5 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

★**Asia Part 6** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn., and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

★**Asia Part 7** *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 8 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure*.

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure*.

Africa Part 2 *Abyssinia, French Somaliland.*—CAPT. R. W. VAN RAVEN DE STURLER, 140 W. 75th St., New York, N. Y.

✠**Africa Part 3** *Sudan.* W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 4 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

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Africa Part 6 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Box 107, Santa Susana, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

Madagascar RALPH LINTON, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe Part 1 *Jugo-Slavia and Greece.*—LIEUT. WM. JENNA, Fort Clayton, Panama, C. Z.

Europe Part 2 *Albania.*—ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving Street, Washington, D. C.

Europe Part 3 *Finland, Lapland and Russia.*—In the case of Russia, political topics outside of historical facts will not be discussed. ALEKO E. LILIUS, care *Adventure.*

Europe Part 4 *Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland.*—THEODORE VON KELER, 153 Waverley Place, New York City.

Europe Part 5 *Scandinavia.*—ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving Street, Washington, D. C.

Europe Part 6 *Great Britain.*—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Avenue, W. C. 2, London, England.

Europe Part 7 *Denmark.*—G. I. COLBRON, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 8 *Holland*—J. J. LEBLEU, 51 Benson Street, Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

Europe Part 9 J. D. NEWSOM, 24 Rue du Vieil-Abreuvoir, St. Germain-en-Laye (S & O), France.

Europe Part 10 *Switzerland.*—DR. ALBERT LEEMAN, Kramgasse, 82, Bern, Switzerland.

Europe Part 11 *France.*—CYRUS S. ROBERTS, 38 E. 85th Street, New York City.

Europe Part 12 *Spain.*—J. D. NEWSOM, 24 Rue du Vieil-Abreuvoir, St. Germain-en-Laye (S & O), France.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 457 W. 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

South America Part 3 *Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, southern Appalachians.*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care *Adventure.*

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern. Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, Coyocutena Farm College, La Libertad, Comayagua, Honduras.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern. Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and states of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. RUSSELL SHEETS, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

Newfoundland.—C. T. JAMES, Bonaventure Ave., St. Johns, Newfoundland.

Greenland Also dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Canada Part 1 *New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.* Also homesteading in Canada Part 1, and fur farming.—FRED L. BOWDEN, 5 Howard Avenue, Binghamton, New York.

✠**Canada Part 2** *Southeastern Quebec.* JAS. F. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 3** *Height of Land Region, Northern Ontario and Northern Quebec, Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin.* Trips for Sport and Adventure—big game, fishing, canoeing, Northland travel, also H. B. Company Posts, Indian tribes and present conditions.—S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), Box 191, North End Station, Detroit, Michigan.

✠**Canada Part 4** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario.*—HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada.

✠**Canada Part 5** *Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario.* Also national parks.—A. D. ROBINSON, 115 Huron St., Walkerville, Ont., Canada.

Canada Part 6 *Hunters Island and English River District.*—T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn.

Canada Part 7 *Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C.

Canada Part 8 *The Northw.Ter. and the Arctic, especially Ellesmere Land, Baffinland, Melville and North Devon Islands, North Greenland and the half-explored islands west of Ellesmere.*—PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

★**Canada Part 9** *Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin and Hudson Bay mineral belt.*—LIONEL H. G. MOORE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada.

Alaska. Also mountain climbing.—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 3009 Crest Trail, Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 1 *California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Utah and Arizona.*—E. E. HARRIMAN, 401 North Ave. 50, Los Angeles, Calif.

Western U. S. Part 2 *New Mexico.* Also Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance.—H. F. ROBINSON, Albuquerque, Box 445, New Mexico.

Western U. S. Part 3 *Colorado and Wyoming. Homesteading. Sheep and Cattle Raising.*—FRANK EARNEST, Keyport, New Jersey.

Western U. S. Part 4 *Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Mina, Nevada.

Western U. S. Part 5 *Idaho and Surrounding Country.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Western U. S. Part 6 *Tex. and Okla.*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S. Part 1 *The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.* Especially early history of Missouri Valley.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 2 *Missouri and Arkansas. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Especially wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

Middle Western U. S. Part 3 *Ind., Ill., Mich., Miss., and Lake Michigan.* Also claiming, natural history legends.—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

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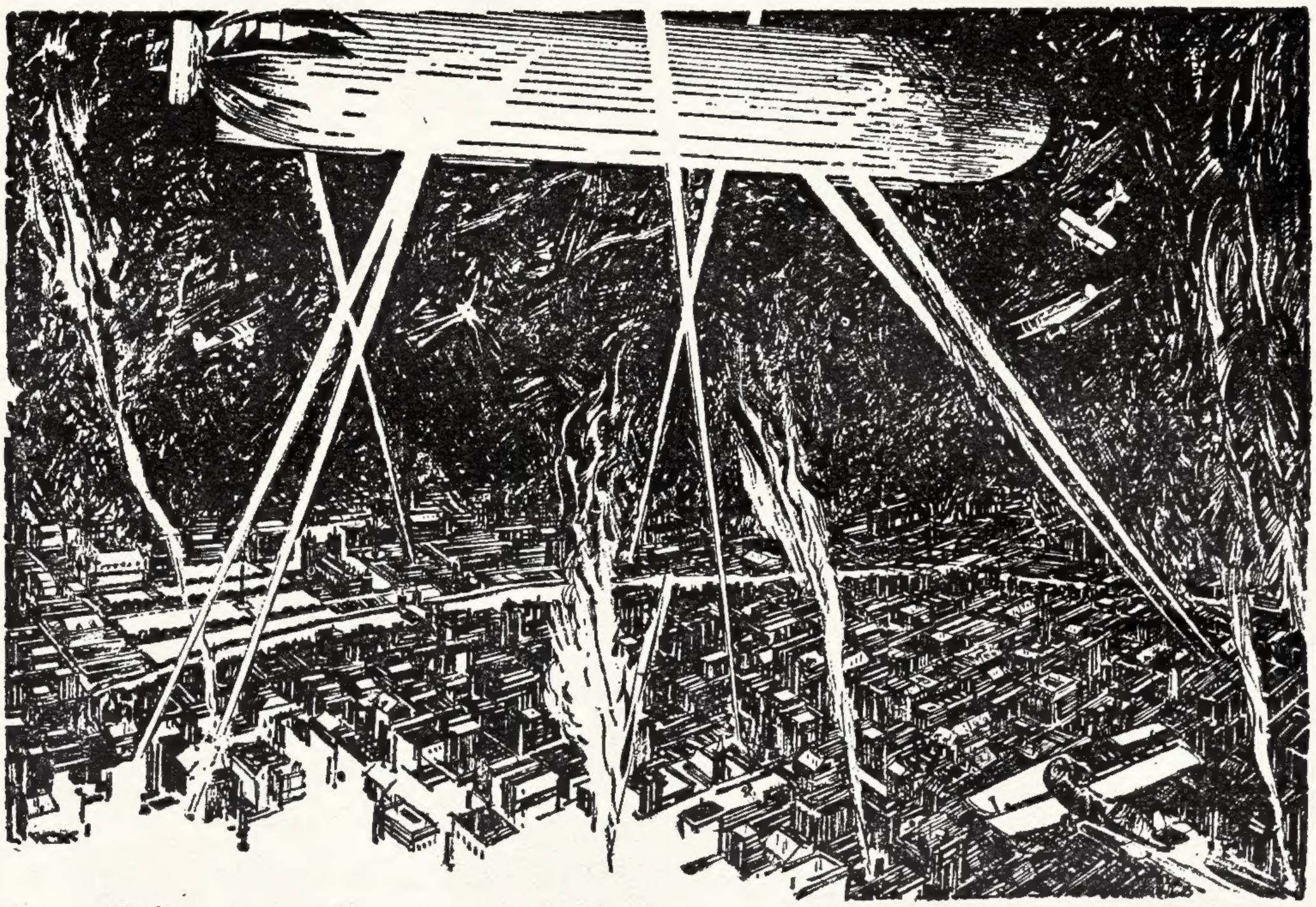

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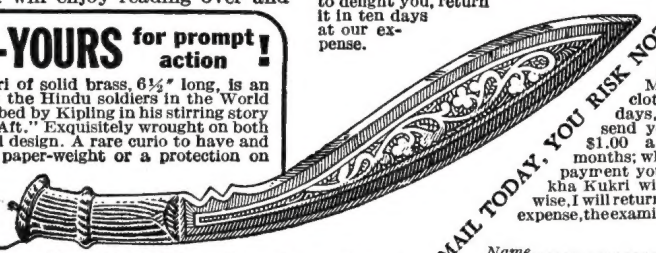

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